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A TREASURY OF  
CAT STORIES

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*A Treasury of*  
CAT STORIES

*Compiled by*  
ERA ZISTEL

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TO TOFFIE,  
who lies buried nowhere  
but in my heart



THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED  
IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE  
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## Preface

OFTEN I'VE WONDERED why people love cats. They serve not, nor do they as a rule obey. They are aloof, self-centred, indolent, useless, stubborn and capricious in their affections. And yet . . . and yet . . .

My dog goes downstairs to call for the mail and brings it up to me. She is eager to please, anxious to obey, alert in anticipating my wishes, willing to be of service in any way possible. When I have been absent for an hour or two she greets me with such exuberance that anyone looking on might think I'd been gone for a month. To her I am mistress of the universe, incapable of error or fault, endowed with the divine right to rule her life. My command is her law. She is my dog, and I am her human . . . And yet . . .

And yet she has fourth place in my heart—because I have three cats. And often I have wondered why this should be.

Rarely do the cats notice when I return home. If they do, I take the precaution of looking at the food plate before I allow myself the luxury of feeling flattered. They respond to my affectionate blandishments with a lazy yawn or a quick leap away after some imaginary fly. They not only don't obey my commands, they usually give a most convincing demonstration of either not having understood or not having heard. They are always occupying the chair I happen to want to sit on. They reduce my ball of knitting yarn to a tangled, mangled, useless mass, and elaborately ignore the playthings I've bought for them. They never say *please* or *thank you* for food; they demand it and then like as not turn away and with devastatingly eloquent gesture of paw tell me what they think of it. When I ask them to come to me they at once find something amazingly interesting in the opposite direction. They are aloof, self-centred, indolent, useless, stubborn and capricious. They don't love me. Quite definitely and irrevocably, they don't love me. And yet . . .

And yet, let one of them leap up on my lap and settle

down in slow exquisite luxury and gaze up at me with grave, round-eyed, soulful contentment, and I am lost, I am wholly lost until I am released again. Let one of them express a wish or utter a complaint or show need of me, and all else is forgotten. Let one of them want the chair I occupy; let one of them put a paw upon my hand to stop the tapping of the typewriter keys; let one of them, with mischievous tilt of the head and imperious paw, tell me it is time for play . . .

Hundreds of people have written millions of words to give plausible explanation for their love of cats. I have not even one small stone to add to that avalanche; for my own love is of another substance, weightless as thistledown. Only the heart, where it flourishes and dies, knows the reason for it (just as the earth knows the seed borne by the thistledown will flower and produce thorns) and only there does it lie heavily sometimes.

There have been a few other collections of "cat stories." The best known of these, Carl Van Vechten's *Lords of the Housetops*, is out of print. The rest have been welcomed by the reading public with tolerance rather than enthusiasm.

Probably the greatest fault of these previous anthologies has been that too many of the works included were either not stories, or not about cats. A short story is a short story, not an anecdote, not a dissertation on cat characteristics, not a series of reminiscences loosely strung together. Similarly, a cat story is a story about a *cat*, and not about Bill and Edna, who got together and fell in love because Edna's "pretty bit of feline fluffiness" happened one day to waft over the back fence and through Bill's window.

The first task, then, in going through the great mass of material written about cats, was to sort out the true cat stories. The mass shrank considerably, once that was accomplished. But what was left was, in the greater part, still far from satisfactory.

There are many stories, for instance, in which cats speak and wear clothes and balance spectacles on their noses and

read the papers and discuss politics and otherwise behave like most unpleasant hybrids between the feline and the human race. They were the next to go into the discard. The exception to this rule is, of course, "Tobermory." Given the disastrous gift of speech, Tobermory says to the despised human beings upon whom his tongue is unleashed exactly what any self-respecting cat would say in like circumstances.

A period of protracted nausea which resulted in the disgorging of a lot of "sugar and spice and all things nice" brought about a further reduction in the quantity of material. No doubt the cat's superb beauty and grace is in the main responsible for the really horrifying turnout of sweet little tales about it. A positive relief it was, an antidote to a most insidious poison, to come across a couple of out-and-out villains. They can be found in this book. Out of gratitude, and with not a little respect, I recommend to the saccharine-sated Frederick Stuart Greene's "The Cat of the Cane-Brake" and F. G. Turnbull's "Ginger: An Outlaw." We may not find these cats exactly charming, but we must give credit to the one for ingenuity and fixity of purpose, to the other for integrity and strict adherence to a code of honour—or habit—that no bribes or threats could alter.

The gruesome "Cat of the Cane-Brake" is the story of a battle, not for supremacy but for life itself, between a cat and a woman. It is anything but a pretty tale, and, as Fred Lewis Pattee has neatly put it, "sticks to the memory like a burr."

The wild cat Ginger, on the other hand, is not deliberately malevolent. His crime is merely his inability to understand the moral code of the inexplicable humans. When, through misguided pity, he becomes part of the complex life men call civilization, a good, strong, fearless cat is turned into a despised marauder and outlaw. He obeys the commandment of the woods, the only commandment he knows: *thou shalt kill*; and the difference between the obnoxious rat and the farmer's prize chicken is a fine distinction he cannot make.

Second cousin to these two is the "Cat That Knew Hell,"

that most intriguing of all heroes, the reformed rogue. His is a story with a happy ending; nevertheless I hear the closing bars of *Till Eulenspiegel* whenever I picture him sitting fat and amiable and comfortable on his satin pillow.

Since the beginning of time, it seems, man has played with the idea of giving service to the devil. And since the beginning of time, apparently, man has looked upon the black cat as the devil's disciple. In "Broomsticks," a feline Faust fights a losing battle and finally gives up his soul to the dark one. Mr. de la Mare has no more than circumstantial evidence to offer, but he is a clever prosecutor and knows how to get a verdict of guilty without being able to produce any eye-witness testimony. In the end we're still not sure about the actual existence of the witch, but of one thing we are positive: Sam *was* guilty.

"Gato Mio," however, makes the accusation less delicately. The witch's threatening shadow is there, darkening the page. Mr. Fernandez *knows* she exists. Has she not been seen in Spain? And could she not fly halfway round the world in less time than it takes to say *scat*? Just as a precaution, therefore, Mr. Fernandez keeps his black Gato tied up.

The Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde theme has also long been a favourite among the story tellers, and is still as up-to-date as today's movie. In "The Identity of Diddums," Caroline Marriage gives the old tale a new twist. Consider the possibility of the perfect Dr. Jekyll surviving instead of the villainous Mr. Hyde. While the effect might not be quite so horrifying, wouldn't it be—well, uncomfortable, to say the least? Such is the duality of us all that we are not only dismayed, but displeased and even terrified by perfection.

The rest of the tales assembled here will doubtlessly meet with more general approval, although some people find Mr. Seton's sympathetic recording of the wanderings of the "Slum Cat" unacceptable. Whatever reasons they may give for disliking the story, I imagine their real objection, if they would or could put it into words, would be based on a charge of "cat immorality." A cat independent of humans?



Incredible! A cat that *prefers* the dirt and discomfort and perilous confusion of the slums to soft, well-fed inactivity on the hearth rug? Shocking! Impossible! Such a cat cannot, must not, exist!

I tried to adopt a stray once. My home amused him for a while—the length of time it took him to tear the rugs, scratch the furniture and break a couple of ornaments. Then he became bored, and at last stood before the door howling for his freedom. I saw him often after that. He was master of the pavements. From each passer-by he collected a toll of kindly pat and word of greeting—and no more would he have than that. Finally he met a man as independent of home and hearth as he, and they became inseparable companions, two strays wandering the streets together.

However, Mr. Seton's little slum cat is not a stray by choice. She is homeless because she has only one love, and that is for her first home in the rubbish heap; and neither distance nor danger nor even a life of luxury can keep her from it.

Of course there is another side to the picture, and it is only fair to present it. In the hauntingly beautiful "Tobias" by Alan Devoe, the cat "gone wild" remembers, while the terrible darkness of the last hour closes around him, a friendly voice, perhaps, or a kind hand; and in his need for succour he creeps back to beg for what has been long forgotten and long lost.

But why was it lost? Why was Tobias without home or master? Why had he taken to the wilderness?

Eleanor Booth Simmons in "Sukey" and Charles G. D. Roberts in "How a Cat Played Robinson Crusoe" provide us with the answer. The cat deserts his home when that home deserts him, answering his cries for admittance with the disinterested stare of vacant windows, the firm denial of barred doors. If he is hardy, like Tobias, he manages to make a go of it, hunts his own food, makes his own bed, conquers unaided all of his enemies but death.

Even the female cat can, with luck and shrewdness and perseverance—and great difficulty—manage to survive without the help of man, as Sir Charles Roberts proves so ably

in his fine authentic account of a cat's winter on a deserted island.

But Sukey, without the luck, just doesn't have a chance. The hardships of an unusually severe winter and first motherhood are too much for her frail, immature little body to withstand.

In "Cat's Cruise," on the other hand, Mazo de la Roche's cat gets along beautifully. Although homeless in the accepted sense of the word, she is nevertheless at home everywhere, and so independent that each time she sails "her past is as nothing to her."

Here is a lesson not yet learned and perhaps one that we do not want to learn: *the cat does not need us*. It needs food and shelter, and sometimes must look to us to provide them. And of course even the cruising cat succumbs occasionally to a longing for comradeship and affection. But to her love is superfluous.

In fact, it may even become a weapon that kills. When I first read Miss Mackenzie Scott's poignant "The Birthday Present" it conjured up painful memories of a cat I had tried hard to forget. Like Mici, she was constantly being snatched out of her sleep to be mauled and crooned over and crushed in the arms of her adoring mistress. Like Mici, she was slowly being killed by love. Out of pity and respect for her I never touched her, but sometimes, when we were alone together, I conversed with her in a friendly, matter-of-fact way on some innocuous topic like the weather, and always she answered with a long, narrow-eyed stare of approval and then, from deep within her, a rusty purr so seldom used that the wonder was it could still grind out a melody. To her this casual, undemonstrative companionship was like a tonic after a steady diet of nothing but sickening sweetness. "The Birthday Present" brought back to me all the powerless pity, the frustrated anger, the guarded affection that made up our strange friendship. No doubt that's one reason why this story seems to me to be one of the finest in the collection.

At this point perhaps it should be hastily stated that the

greater number of tales in this book are not at all tragic, that there are plenty with happy endings, and that some of them are really quite jolly.

Peggy Bacon's "The Kitten's Tailor," for instance, feathery light and as capriciously upside down as its title, has everything turning out well in the end—with the kitten still on top.

In "Conversation With a Cat" the cat most decidedly proves herself superior, too, and the effect upon Mr. Belloc is amusingly devastating. Mr. Belloc, author of the now famous lines ". . . but never upon any occasion will They eat anything that has been poisoned, so utterly lacking are They in simplicity and humility . . .", has managed to build up for himself quite a reputation for abhorring cats. Is it all Amatheia's fault? Can it be that his aversion, boasted of so frequently as to foster doubt of its genuineness, is really made up of two parts shyness and one part self-defence? Could he but find an Amatheia who would come up to his standards: "You are my cat and I am your human. Now and onwards into the fullness of peace"—is it possible that then his predilection would no longer need wear the cloak of vituperation?

Two stories have been included mainly because they are diverting. Rules for entry were, although not exactly broken, at least bent considerably to admit such an exciting, droll piece of grotesquerie as Mr. Smith's "Cat and the Cobra."

I sincerely hope that sensitive readers will not be too dismayed at the death by drowning of one of the black cats in the second of these, "A Black Affair." Mr. Jacobs assures us that it wasn't a very nice cat, anyway, and after all, it's all in fun, isn't it?

To prove that the cat is also upon occasion capable of love and devotion, there is "The Totem of Amarillo," a story of "the yellow one's" constancy and ultimate sacrifice for a little blind Indian boy; "If She Had the Family," a lovely fragment of a tale by Ibbey Hall in which a strange

adoption restores to a mother her lost happiness and contentment; and the by now famous story, "The Cat," by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman.

To be absolutely frank, the first time I read "The Cat," I thought it incredible. But that was before I made the acquaintance of a certain cat called Kitty.

Kitty was, like Mrs. Freeman's Cat, a resident of the mountain woods. He had no home, he foraged for his food; where he slept I never knew. One summer day I had the great misfortune to meet him; then and there he made up his mind that I was his and he was mine and nothing could persuade him that it was otherwise. He tried everything he could think of to make me like him, and by accident he finally found a way. While I was working in the woods I heard a small animal cry of terror close by and, upon investigating, discovered that Kitty had caught a chipmunk. With unreasonable humanity I commanded him to give it up. He did, and I carried it away.

From then on, each day I found a gift on my doorstep. Sometimes, when chipmunks were apparently unavailable, it is true he substituted a small mouse, but never once did he forget me; not until that day late in the fall when the doorstep remained empty and I knew that he was dead.

Of course I am not conceited enough to believe his love for me was entirely unselfish. It was just as selfish as all love is in the last analysis. I represented something to him, some dim memory of happiness in the past: a kind voice, a gentle hand stroking him, a lap to curl up in, a bowl of warm milk, a pillow before the fire when winter came. For these luxuries, which he never achieved, he was willing to pay what must have been a great price in the only common currency of man and beast: food.

So it must have been, I think, with Mrs. Freeman's Cat. Kitty has at last convinced me that her beautifully written story might have happened just as she told it. In fact, I am even tempted to go a little beyond that: to say I believe it must have happened, somewhere, at some time. For in-

vention rarely ventures quite so boldly into the improbable as does reality itself.

There are two stories of "cat jealousy." "The Undoing of Morning Glory Adolphus" is an amusing tale about the cat who found himself divested of the second word in that beautiful long name he had been given; how he tried by subtle means to get rid of his rival; and how, having failed, he "made the best of it," cat fashion.

My own story is an account of jealousy of a much more serious nature, almost pathological, you might say. There is plenty of evidence on record of jealousy toward human beings in dogs; in the cat, however, it seems to be exceedingly rare. Nevertheless it does occur occasionally.

As for Calvin, he needs no introduction, no recommendation, since for so many years he has been a favourite. Without him a collection of cats could not be called complete, so here he is again, in Mr. Warner's beloved classic.

And last of all, but not least, there is Jake. Some people may comment gleefully: "Aha! But this is a true account, and therefore an anecdote, and therefore, according to the rules, shouldn't be in this collection." To me, Mr. Gascoyen's memorial "to Jake, Wherever He May Be," done with such delicate humour, sensitive understanding and love, is more than a mere anecdote: it is a little masterpiece of its kind, whatever that kind may be. If it violates the rules, very well then, rules are made to be broken. At any rate, Jake came, and he stays.

A letter from Mr. Gascoyen stated that "To Jake, Wherever He May Be" was to be included in a volume of his own stories scheduled for publication. That was some time ago, but the Atlantic being the formidable barrier these days have made of it, I have not been able to ascertain whether his plans were carried out. I can, therefore, only wish him good luck, and a return to the contentment and happiness of the life he once had with Jake.

So here is the cat, sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes beautiful and noble, sometimes scrawny, ill-fed, out-

cast, sometimes worshipped, sometimes maligned, sometimes prancing through a life of gaiety and charm, sometimes stalked by tragedy and death. Here is the cat displayed in many lights and shadows. He is not always lovable, he may seem ugly, cruel, deceitful or ungrateful, depending upon the fall of the light. But in each and every one of these portraits is displayed an attribute that will no doubt be his for all time. He is a cat—and proud of it. There is the core of his integrity, and perhaps sufficient reason for our love.

Lest some readers fret over the fact that favourite stories translated from another tongue are not included, let me say that this volume is devoted entirely to the works of American and English writers. If it is at all feasible, I plan to bring together stories by Colette, Eggebrecht, Ehrenstein, Eipper, Fleuron, Gauthier, Gorki, Huysmans, Loti and others, in another volume.

Lest some other readers suspect me of carelessness because one or another of their domestic favourites is missing, let me assure them that I know Poe's "The Black Cat" and like it for what it is, but do not consider it a true cat story and therefore have not included it; that Benet's "The King of the Cats" was eliminated because unfortunately the cat is made to wear clothes and conduct an orchestra; that a good many others were in the end excluded because I felt they did not quite come up to the standard set by these chosen ones, or because they were too close to being a duplication of one of them. For only a single story was I refused permission to reprint—and I understand that is the Kipling custom.

To the various authors represented here I want to express my most sincere gratitude for their ready co-operation.

Special thanks are hereby given to those who have allowed me to reprint from their books: Mr. Ernest Thompson Seton, whose "The Slum Cat" may be found in a collection of his stories entitled *Animal Heroes*, published by Scribner's in 1905; Mr. Alan Devoe, whose "Tobias" appeared in *Phudd Hill*, published by Julian Messner; Miss Peggy

Bacon for the "Kitten's Tailor," from *The True Philosopher and Other Cat Tales* (all of them quite as delightful as the one reprinted here), published by The Four Seas Company in 1919; Mr. Hilaire Belloc for "A Conversation With a Cat," from *A Conversation with a Cat and Others*, published by Harper Brothers; Miss Caroline Marriage for "The Identity of Diddums," from *Nine Lives*, published by Edward Arnold & Co.; and Sir Charles G. D. Roberts for "How a Cat Played Robinson Crusoe," from *Neighbours Unknown*, published by The Macmillan Company.

And a word of good luck to Colonel A. W. Smith, who is, at the time this is being written, "on a mission to Africa." May he return safely, with lots of stories as good as "The Cat and the Cobra."

And lastly, thanks to Eric Posselt, who was so helpful in untangling red tape, and telling me what not to do.

ERA ZISTEL

## *A Conversation with a Cat*

HILAIRE BELLOC

THE OTHER DAY I went into the bar of a railway station and, taking a glass of beer, I sat down at a little table by myself to meditate upon the necessary but tragic isolation of the human soul. I began my meditation by consoling myself with the truth that something in common runs through all nature, but I went on to consider that this cuts no ice, and that the heart needed something more. I might by long research have discovered some third term a little less hackneyed than these two, when fate, or some good influence or accident, or the ocean and my fostering star, sent me a tawny, silky, long-haired cat.

If it be true that nations have the cats they deserve, then the English people deserve well in cats, for there are none so prosperous or so friendly in the world. But even for an English cat this cat was exceptionally friendly and fine—especially friendly. It leapt at one graceful bound into my lap, nestled there, put out an engaging right front paw to touch my arm with a pretty timidity by way of introduction, rolled up at me an eye of bright but innocent affection, and then smiled a secret smile of approval.

No man could be so timid after such an approach as not to make some manner of response. So did I. I even took the liberty of stroking Amatheia (for by that name did I receive this vision), and though I began this gesture in a respectful fashion, after the best models of polite deportment with strangers, I was soon lending it some warmth, for I was touched to find that I had a friend; yes, even here, at the ends of the tubes in S.W.99. I proceeded (as is right) from caress to speech, and said, "Amatheia, most beautiful of cats, why have you deigned to single me out for so much favour? Did you recognise in me a friend to all that breathes, or were you yourself suffering from loneliness



(though I take it you are near your own dear home), or is there pity in the hearts of animals as there is in the hearts of some humans? What, then, was your motive? Or am I, indeed, foolish to ask, and not rather to take whatever good comes to me in whatever way from the gods?"

To these questions Amatheia answered with a loud purring noise, expressing with closed eyes of ecstasy her delight in the encounter.

"I am more than flattered, Amatheia," said I, by way of answer; "I am consoled. I did not know that there was in the world anything breathing and moving, let alone one so tawny-perfect, who would give companionship for its own sake and seek out, through deep feeling, some one companion out of all living kind. If you do not address me in words I know the reason and I commend it; for in words lie the seeds of all dissension, and love at its most profound is silent. At least, I read that in a book, Amatheia; yes, only the other day. But I confess that the book told me nothing of those gestures which are better than words, or of that caress which I continue to bestow upon you with all the gratitude of my poor heart."

To this Amatheia made a slight gesture of acknowledgment—not disdainful—wagging her head a little, and then settling it down in deep content.

"Oh, beautiful-haired Amatheia, many have praised you before you found me to praise you, and many will praise you, some in your own tongue, when I am no longer held in the bonds of your presence. But none will praise you more sincerely. For there is not a man living who knows better than I that the four charms of a cat lie in its closed eyes, its long and lovely hair, its silence, and even its affected love."

But at the word affected Amatheia raised her head, looked up at me tenderly, once more put forth her paw to touch my arm, and then settled down again to a purring beatitude.

"You are secure," said I sadly; "mortality is not before you. There is in your complacency no foreknowledge of death nor even of separation. And for that reason, Cat, I

welcome you the more. For if there has been given to your kind this repose in common living, why, then, we men also may find it by following your example and not considering too much what may be to come and not remembering too much what has been and will never return. Also, I thank you, for this, Amatheia, my sweet Euplokamos" (for I was becoming a little familiar through an acquaintance of a full five minutes and from the absence of all recalcitrance), "that you have reminded me of my youth, and in a sort of shadowy way, a momentary way, have restored it to me. For there is an age, a blessed youthful age (O My Cat) even with the miserable race of men, when all things are consonant with the life of the body, when sleep is regular and long and deep, when enmities are either unknown or a subject for rejoicing, and when the whole of being is lapped in hope as you are now lapped on my lap, Amatheia. Yes, we also, we of the doomed race, know peace. But whereas you possess it from blind kittenhood to that last dark day so mercifully short with you, we grasp it only for a very little while. But I would not sadden you by the mortal plaint. That would be treason indeed, and a vile return for your goodness. What! When you have chosen me out of seven London millions upon whom to confer the tender solace of the heart, when you have proclaimed yourself so suddenly to be my dear, shall I introduce you to the sufferings of those of whom you know nothing save that they feed you, house you and pass you by? At least you do not take us for gods, as do the dogs, and the more am I humbly beholden to you for this little service of recognition—and something more."

Amatheia slowly raised herself upon her four feet, arched her back, yawned, looked up at me with a smile sweeter than ever and then went round and round, preparing for herself a new couch upon my coat, whereon she settled and began once more to purr in settled ecstasy.

Already had I made sure that a rooted and anchored affection had come to me from out the emptiness and nothingness of the world and was to feed my soul hence-

forward; already had I changed the mood of long years and felt a conversion towards the life of things, an appreciation, a cousinship with the created light—and all that through one new link of loving kindness—when whatever it is that dashes the cup of bliss from the lips of mortal man (Tupper) up and dashed it good and hard. It was the Ancient Enemy who put the fatal sentence into my heart, for we are the playthings of the greater powers, and surely some of them are evil.

“You will never leave me, Amatheia,” I said; “I will respect your sleep and we will sit here together through all uncounted time, I holding you in my arms and you dreaming of the fields of Paradise. Nor shall anything part us, Amatheia; you are my cat and I am your human. Now and onwards into the fullness of peace.”

Then it was that Amatheia lifted herself once more, and with delicate, discreet, unweighted movement of perfect limbs leapt lightly to the floor as lovely as a wave. She walked slowly away from me without so much as looking back over her shoulder; she had another purpose in her mind; and as she so gracefully and so majestically neared the door which she was seeking, a short, unpleasant man standing at the bar said, “Puss, Puss, Puss!” and stooped to scratch her gently behind the ear. With what a wealth of singular affection, pure and profound, did she not gaze up at him, and then rub herself against his leg in token and external expression of a sacramental friendship that should never die.

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# *The Slum Cat*

ERNEST THOMPSON SETON

## LIFE I

THE LITTLE SLUM KITTEN was not six weeks old yet, but she was alone in the old junk-yard. Her mother had gone to seek food among the garbage-boxes the night before, and had never returned, so when the second evening came she was very hungry. A deep-laid instinct drove her forth from the old cracker-box to seek something to eat. Feeling her way silently among the rubbish she smelt everything that seemed eatable, but without finding food. At length she reached the wooden steps leading down into Jap Malee's bird store underground at the far end of the yard. The door was open a little, and she walked in. A Negro sitting idly on a box in a corner watched her curiously. She wandered past some Rabbits; they paid no heed. She came to a wide-barred cage in which was a Fox. He crouched low; his eyes glowed. The Kitten wandered, sniffing, up to the bars, put her head in, sniffed again, then made straight toward the feed-pan, to be seized in a flash by the crouching Fox. She gave a frightened "mew," and the Negro also sprang forward, spitting with such copious vigour in the Fox's face that he dropped the Kitten and returned to the corner, there to sit blinking his eyes in sullen fear.

The Negro pulled the Kitten out. She tottered in a circle a few times, then revived, and a few minutes later, when Jap Malee came back, she was purring in the Negro's lap, apparently none the worse.

Jap was not an Oriental: he was a full-blooded Cockney; but his eyes were such little accidental slits aslant in his round, flat face that his first name was forgotten in the highly descriptive title of "Jap." He was not especially unkind to the birds and beasts which furnished his living, but he did not want the Slum Kitten.

The Negro gave her all the food she could eat, and then carried her to a distant block and dropped her in an iron-yard. Here she lived and somehow found food enough to grow till, weeks later, an extended exploration brought her back to her old quarters in the junk-yard, and glad to be at home, she at once settled down.

Kitty was now fully grown. She was a striking-looking Cat of the Tiger type. Her marks were black on a pale grey, and the four beauty spots of white, on nose, ears and tail-tip, lent a certain distinction. She was expert now at getting a living, yet she had some days of starvation, and had so far failed in her ambition to catch a Sparrow. She was quite alone, but a new force was coming into her life.

She was lying in the sun one September day when a large black Cat came walking along the top of a wall in her direction. By his torn ear she recognised him at once as an old enemy. She slunk into her box and hid. He picked his way gingerly, bounded lightly to a shed that was at the end of the yard, and was crossing the roof when a yellow Cat rose up. The black Tom glared and growled; so did the yellow Tom. Their tails lashed from side to side. Strong throats growled and yowled. They approached with ears laid back, with muscles a-tense.

"Yow—yow—ow," said the Black one.

"Wow—w—w—" was the slightly deeper answer.

"Ya—wow—wow—wow—" said the Black one, edging up an inch nearer.

"Yow—w—w—" was the Yellow answer, as the blond Cat rose to full height and stepped with vast dignity a whole inch forward. "Yow—w," and he went another inch, while his tail went swish, thump, from one side to the other.

"Ya—wow—yow—w," screamed the Black in a rising tone, and he backed the eighth of an inch as he marked the broad, unshrinking beast before him.

Windows opened all around, human voices were heard, but the Cat scene went on.

"Yow—yow—ow," rumbled the Yellow peril, his voice

deepening as the other's rose. "Yow," and he advanced another step.

Now their noses were but three inches apart; they stood sidewise, both ready to clinch, but each waiting for the other. They glared at each other for three minutes in silence, and like statues, except that each tail-tip was twisting.

The Yellow began again. "Yow—ow—ow," in deep tone.

"Ya-a-a-a," screamed the Black with intent to strike terror by his yell, but he retreated one-sixteenth of an inch. The Yellow walked up a whole long inch; their whiskers were mixing now; another advance, and their noses almost touched.

"Yo—w—w," said Yellow, like a deep moan.

"Ya-a-a-a," screamed Black, but he retreated a thirty-second of an inch, and the Yellow warrior closed and clinched like a demon.

Oh, how they rolled and bit and tore—especially the Yellow one!

How they pitched and gripped and hugged—but especially the Yellow one!

Over and over, sometimes one on top, sometimes the other, but usually the Yellow one, and over they rolled till off the roof, amid cheers from all the windows. They lost not a second in that fall into the junk-yard; they tore and clawed all the way down, but especially the Yellow one; and when they struck the ground, still fighting, the one on top was chiefly the Yellow one; and before they separated both had had as much as they wanted, especially the Black one! He scaled the wall, and, bleeding and growling, disappeared, while the news was passed from window to window that Cayley's "Nig" had been licked by "Orange Billy."

Either the yellow Cat was a very clever seeker, or else Slum Kitty did not hide very hard, for he discovered her among the boxes and she made no attempt to get away, probably because she had witnessed the fight. There is nothing like success in warfare to win the female heart, and thereafter the yellow Tom and Kitty became very good friends, not sharing each other's lives or food—Cats do not

do that much—but recognizing each other as entitled to special friendly privileges.

When October's shortening days were on an event took place in the old cracker-box. If "Orange Billy" had come he would have seen five little Kittens curled up in the embrace of their mother, the little Slum Kitty. It was a wonderful thing for her. She felt all the elation an animal mother can feel—all the delight—as she tenderly loved them and licked them.

She had added a joy to her joyless life, but she had also added a heavy burden. All her strength was taken now to find food. And one day, led by a tempting smell, she wandered into the bird cellar and into an open cage. Everything was still, there was meat ahead, and she reached forward to seize it; the cage door fell with a snap, and she was a prisoner. That night the Negro put an end to the Kittens and was about to do the same with the mother when her unusual markings attracted the attention of the bird man, who decided to keep her.

## LIFE II

Jap Malee was as disreputable a little Cockney bantam as ever sold cheap Canary birds in a cellar. He was extremely poor, and the Negro lived with him because the "Henglish-man" was willing to share bed and board. Jap was perfectly honest according to his lights, but he had no lights, and there is little doubt that his chief revenue was derived from storing and restoring stolen Dogs and Cats. The Fox and the half a dozen Canaries were mere blinds. The "Lost and Found" columns of the papers were the only ones of interest to Jap, but he noticed and saved a clipping about breeding for fur. This was stuck on the wall of his den, and under its influence he set about making an experiment with the Slum Cat. First he soaked her dirty fur with stuff to kill the two or three kinds of creepers she wore, and when it had done its work he washed her thoroughly. Kitty was

savagely indignant, but a warm and happy glow spread over her as she dried off in a cage near the stove, and her fur began to fluff out with wonderful softness and whiteness. Jap and his assistant were much pleased. But this was preparatory. "Nothing is so good for growing fur as plenty of oily food and continued exposure to cold weather," said the clipping. Winter was at hand, and Jap Malee put Kitty's cage out in the yard, protected only from the rain and the direct wind, and fed her with all the oil cake and fish heads she could eat. In a week the change began to show. She was rapidly getting fat. She had nothing to do but get fat and dress her fur. Her cage was kept clean, and Nature responded to the chill weather and oily food by making Kitty's coat thicker and glossier every day, so that by Christmas she was an unusually beautiful Cat in the fullest and finest of fur with markings that were at least a rarity.

Why not send the Slum Cat to the show now coming on?

"T'won't do, ye kneow, Sammy, to henter 'er as a Tramp Cat, ye kneow," Jap observed to his help; "but it kin be arranged to suit the Knickerbockers. Nothink like a good noime, ye kneow. Ye see now, it had orte be 'Royal' some-think or other—nothink goes with the Knickerbockers like 'Royal' anythink. Now, 'Royal Dick' or 'Royal Sam': 'ow's that? But 'owld on: them's Tom names. Oi say, Sammy, wot's the noime of that island where you were born?"

"Analostan Island, sah, was my native vicinity, sah."

"Oi say, now, that's good, ye kneow. 'Royal Analostan,' by Jove! The onliest pedigreed Royal Analostan in the howle sheow, ye kneow. Ain't that capital?" and they mingled their cackles.

"But we'll 'ave to 'ave a pedigree, ye kneow;" so a very long fake pedigree on the recognized lines was prepared.

One afternoon Sam, in a borrowed silk hat, delivered the Cat and the pedigree at the show door. He had been a barber, and he could put on more pomp in five minutes than Jap Malee could have displayed in a lifetime, and



this, doubtless, was one reason for the respectful reception awarded the Royal Analostan at the Cat show.

Jap had all the cockney's reverence for the upper class. He was proud to be an exhibitor, but when, on the opening day, he went to the door he was overpowered to see the array of carriages and silk hats. The gateman looked at him sharply but passed him on his ticket, doubtless taking him for a stable boy to some exhibitor. The hall had velvet carpets before the long rows of cages. Jap was sneaking down the side row, glancing at the Cats of all kinds, noting the blue ribbons and the reds, glancing about but not daring to ask for his own exhibit, inwardly trembling to think what the gorgeous gathering of fashion would say if they discovered the trick he was playing on them. But he saw no sign of Slum Kitty.

In the middle of the centre aisle were the high-class Cats. A great throng was there. The passage was roped and two policemen were there to keep the crowd moving. Jap wriggled in among them: he was too short to see over, but he gathered from the remarks that the gem of the show was there.

"Oh, isn't she a beauty!" said one tall woman.

"Ah! what distinction!" was the reply.

"One cannot mistake the air that comes only from ages of the most refined surroundings."

"How I should like to own that superb creature!"

Jap pushed near enough to get a glimpse of the cage and read a placard which announced that "The Blue Ribbon and Gold Medal of the Knickerbocker High Society Cat and Pet Show had been awarded to the thoroughbred pedigreed Royal Analostan, imported and exhibited by J. Malee, Esquire, the well-known fancier. Not for sale." Jap caught his breath; he stared—yes, surely, there, high in a gilded cage on velvet cushions, with two policemen for guards, her fur bright black and pale grey, her bluish eyes slightly closed, was his Slum Kitty, looking the picture of a Cat that was bored to death.

Jap Malee lingered around that cage for hours, drinking

a draught of glory such as he had never before known. But he saw that it would be wise for him to remain unknown; his "butler" must do all the business.

It was Slum Kitty who made that show a success. Each day her value went up in the owner's eye. He did not know what prices had been given for Cats and thought that he was touching a record pitch when his "butler" gave the director authority to sell the Cat for one hundred dollars.

This is how it came about that the Slum Cat found herself transferred to a Fifth Avenue mansion. She showed a most unaccountable wildness as well as other peculiarities. Her retreat from the Lap Dog to the centre of the dinner-table was understood to express a deep-rooted though mistaken idea of avoiding a defiling touch. The patrician way in which she would get the cover off a milk-can was especially applauded, while her frequent wallowings in the garbage-pail were understood to be the manifestation of a little pardonable high-born eccentricity. She was fed and pampered, shown and praised, but she was not happy. She clawed at that blue ribbon around her neck till she got it off; she jumped against the plate glass because that seemed the road to outside; and she would sit and gaze out on the roofs and back yards at the other side of the window and wish she could be among them for a change.

She was strictly watched—was never allowed outside—so that all the happy garbage-pail moments occurred while these receptacles of joy were indoors. But one night in March, as they were being set out a-row for the early scavenger, the Royal Analostan saw her chance, slipped out of the door, and was lost to view.

Of course there was a grand stir, but Pussy neither knew nor cared anything about that. Her one thought was to go home. A raw east wind had been rising, and now it came to her with a particularly friendly message. Man would have called it an unpleasant smell of the docks, but to Pussy it was a welcome message from her own country. She trotted

on down the long street due east, threading the rails of front gardens, stopping like a statue for an instant, or crossing the street in search of the darkest side. She came at length to the docks and to the water, but the place was strange. She could go north or south; something turned her southward, and dodging among docks and Dogs, carts and Cats, crooked arms of the bay and straight board fences, she got in an hour or two into familiar scenes and smells, and before the sun came up she crawled back, weary and footsore, through the same old hole in the same old fence, and over a wall into her junk yard back of the bird cellar, yes, back into the very cracker-box where she was born.

After a long rest she came quietly down from the cracker-box toward the steps leading to the cellar, and engaged in her old-time pursuit of seeking for eatables. The door opened, and there stood the Negro. He shouted to the bird-man inside:

"Say, Boss, come hyar! Ef dere ain't dat dar Royal Ankalostan comed back!"

Jap came in time to see the Cat jumping the wall. The Royal Analostan had been a windfall for him; had been the means of adding many comforts to the cellar and several prisoners to the cages. It was now of the utmost importance to recapture Her Majesty. Stale fish heads and other infallible lures were put out till Pussy was induced to chew at a large fish head in a box trap. The Negro in watching pulled the string that dropped the lid, and a minute later the Analostan was again in a cage in the cellar. Meanwhile Jap had been watching the "Lost and Found" column. There it was: "Twenty-five dollars reward," etc. That night Mr. Malee's "butler" called at the Fifth Avenue mansion with the missing Cat. "Mr. Malee's compliments, sah." Of course, Mr. Malee would not be rewarded, but the "butler" was evidently open to any offer.

Kitty was guarded carefully after that, but so far from being disgusted with the old life of starving and glad of her care, she became wilder and more dissatisfied.

The spring was on in full power now, and the Fifth Avenue

family were thinking of their country residence. They packed up, closed house, and moved off to the summer home some fifty miles away, and Pussy, in a basket, went with them.

The basket was put on the back seat of a carriage. New sounds and passing smells were entered and left. Then a roaring of many feet, more swinging of the basket, then some clicks, some bangs, a long, shrill whistle, and door-bells of a very big front door, a rumbling, a whizzing, an unpleasant smell; then there was a succession of jolts, roars, jars, stops, clicks, clacks, smells, jumps, shakes, more smells, more shakes, big shakes, little shakes, gases, smoke, screeches, door-bells, tremblings, roars, thunders, and some new smells, raps, taps, heavings, rumbling and more smells. When at last it all stopped the sun came twinkling through the basket lid. The Royal Cat was lifted into another carriage and they turned aside from their past course. Very soon the carriage swerved, the noises of its wheels were grittings and rattlings, a new and horrible sound was added—the barking of Dogs, big and little, and dreadfully close. The basket was lifted, and Slum Kitty had reached her country home.

Everyone was officiously kind. All wanted to please the Royal Cat, but, somehow, none of them did, except possibly the big, fat cook that Kitty discovered on wandering into the kitchen. That greasy woman smelt more like a slum than anything she had met for months, and the Royal Analostan was proportionately attracted. The cook, when she learned that fears were entertained about the Cat's staying, said: "Shure, she'd 'tind to thot; wanst a Cat licks her futs shure she's at home." So she deftly caught the unapproachable Royalty in her apron and committed the horrible sacrilege of greasing the soles of her feet with pot grease. Of course, Kitty resented it; she resented everything in the place; but on being set down she began to dress her paws, and found evident satisfaction in that grease. She licked all four feet for an hour, and the cook triumphantly announced that now "shure she's be apt to sthay;" and stay she did, but she showed a most surprising and

disgusting preference for the kitchen and the cook and the garbage-pail.

The family, though distressed by these high-born eccentricities, were glad to see the Royal Analostan more contented and approachable. They gave her more liberty after a week or two. They guarded her from every menace. The Dogs were taught to respect her; no man or boy about the place would have dreamed of throwing a stone at the famous pedigreed Cat, and she had all the food she wanted, but still she was not happy. She was hankering for many things, she scarcely knew what. She had everything—yes, but she wanted something else. Plenty to eat and drink—yes, but milk does not taste the same when you can go and drink all you want from a saucer; it has to be stolen out of a tin pail when one is pinched with hunger, or it does not have the tang—it is not milk.

How Pussy did hate it all! True, there was one sweet-smelling shrub in the whole horrible place—one that she did enjoy nipping and rubbing against it; it was the only bright spot in her country life.

One day, after a summer of discontent, a succession of things happened that stirred anew the slum instincts of the Royal prisoner. A great bundle of stuff from the docks had reached the country mansion. What it contained was of little moment, but it was rich with the most piquant of slum smells. The chords of memory surely dwell in the nose, and Pussy's past was conjured up with dangerous force. Next day the cook left through some trouble. That evening the youngest boy of the house, a horrid little American with no proper appreciation of Royalty, was tying a tin to the blue-blooded one's tail, doubtless in furtherance of some altruistic project, when Pussy resented it with a paw that wore five big fish-hooks for the occasion. The howl of down-trodden America roused America's mother; the deft and womanly blow she aimed with her book was miraculously avoided, and Pussy took flight, upstairs, of course. A hunted Rat runs downstairs, a hunted Dog goes on the level, a hunted Cat runs up. She hid in the garret and waited till

night came. Then, gliding downstairs, she tried the screen doors, found one unlatched, and escaped into black August night. Pitch black to man's eyes, it was simply grey to her, and she glided through the disgusting shrubbery and flower-beds, had a final nip at that one little bush that had been an attractive spot in the garden, and boldly took her back track of the spring.

How could she take a back track that she never saw? There is in all animals some sense of direction. It is low in man and high in Horses, but Cats have a large gift, and this mysterious guide took her westward, not clearly and definitely, but with a general impulse that was made definite because the easiest travel was on the road. In an hour she had reached the Hudson River. Her nose had told her many times that the course was true. Smell after smell came back.

At the river was the railroad. She could not go on the water; she must go north or south. This was a case where her sense of direction was clear: it said "go south;" and Kitty trotted down the footpath between the iron rails and the fence.

### LIFE III

Cats can go very fast up a tree or over a wall, but when it comes to the long, steady trot that reels off mile after mile, hour after hour, it is not the Cat-hop, but the Dog-trot, that counts. She became tired and a little footsore. She was thinking of a rest when a Dog came running to the fence near by and broke out into such a horrible barking close to her ear that Pussy leaped in terror. She ran as hard as she could down the path. The barking seemed to grow into a low rumble—a louder rumble and roaring—a terrifying thunder. A light shone; Kitty glanced back to see, not the Dog, but a huge black thing with a blazing eye, coming on yowling and spitting like a yard full of Tom Cats. She put forth all her power to run, made such time as she never had made before, but dared not leap the fence. She was running

like a Dog—was flying, but all in vain: the monstrous pursuer overtook her, but missed her in the darkness, and hurried past to be lost in the night, while Kitty sat gasping for breath.

This was only the first encounter with the strange monsters—strange to her eyes—her nose seemed to know them, and told her that this was another landmark on the home trail. But Pussy learned that they were very stupid and could not find her at all if she hid by slipping quietly under a fence and lying still. Before morning she had encountered many of them, but escaped unharmed from all.

About sunrise she reached a nice little slum on her home trail and was lucky enough to find several unsterilized eatables in an ash-heap. She spent the day around a stable. It was very like home, but she had no idea of staying there. She was driven by an inner craving that was neither hunger nor fear, and next evening set out as before. She had seen the "One-eyed Thunder-rollers" all day going by, and was getting used to them. That night passed much like the first one. The days went by in skulking in barns, hiding from Dogs and small boys, and the nights in limping along the track, for she was getting footsore; but on she went, mile after mile, southward, ever southward—Dogs, boys, roarers, hunger—Dogs, boys, roarers, hunger—but day after day with increasing weariness on she went, and her nose from time to time cheered her by confidently reporting, "This surely is a smell we passed last spring."

So week after week went by, and Pussy, dirty, ribbonless, footsore and weary, arrived at the Harlem Bridge. Though it was enveloped in delicious smells she did not like the look of that bridge. For half the night she wandered up and down the shore without discovering any other means of going south excepting some other bridges. Somehow she had to come back to it; not only its smells were familiar, but from time to time when a "One-eye" ran over it there was the peculiar rumbling roar that was a sensation in the springtime trip. She leaped to the timber stringer and

glided out over the water. She had got less than a third of the way over when a "Thundering One-eye" came roaring at her from the opposite end. She was much frightened, but knowing their blindness she dropped to a low side beam and there crouched in hiding. Of course, the stupid monster missed her and passed on, and all would have been well, but it turned back, or another just like it, and came suddenly roaring behind her. Pussy leaped to the long track and made for the home shore. She might have got there, but a third of the red-eye terrors came roaring down at her from that side. She was running her hardest, but was caught between two foes. There was nothing for it but a desperate leap from the timbers into—she did not know what. Down—down—down—plop! splash! plunge—into the deep water, not cold, for it was August, but oh! so horrible. She spluttered and coughed and struck out for the shore. She had never learned to swim, and yet she swam, for the simple reason that a Cat's position and attitude in swimming are the same as her position and attitude in walking. She had fallen into a place she did not like; naturally she tried to walk out, and the result was that she swam ashore. Which shore? It never fails—the south—the shore nearest home. She scrambled out all dripping wet, up the muddy bank and through coal-piles and dust-heaps, looking as black, dirty and unroyal as it was possible for a Cat to look.

Once the shock was over the Royal pedigreed slummer began to feel better for the plunge. A genial glow without from the bath, a genial sense of triumph within, for had she not outwitted three of the big terrors?

Her nose, her memory and her instinct of direction inclined her to get on the track again, but the place was infested with the big thunder-rollers, and prudence led her to turn aside and follow the river bank with its musky home reminders.

She was more than two days learning the infinite dangers and complexities of the East River docks, and at length, on the third night, she reached familiar ground, the place she



had passed the night of her first escape. From that her course was sure and rapid. She knew just where she was going and how to get there. She knew even the most prominent features in the Dogscape now. She went faster, felt happier. In a little while she would be curled up in the old junk-yard. Another turn and the block was in sight—

But—what!—it was gone. Kitty could not believe her eyes. There, where had stood, or leaned, or slouched, or straggled—the houses of the block—was a great broken wilderness of stone, lumber and holes in the ground.

Kitty walked all around it. She knew by the bearings and by the local colour of the pavement that she was in her home; that there had lived the bird-man, and there was the old junk yard; but all were gone, completely gone, taking the familiar odours with them; and Pussy turned sick at heart in the utter hopelessness of the case. Her home love was her master mood. She had given up all to come to a home that no longer existed, and for once her brave little spirit was cast down. She wandered over the silent heaps of rubbish and found neither consolation nor eatables. The ruin had covered several of the blocks and reached back from the water. It was not a fire. Kitty had seen one of these things once. Pussy knew nothing of the great bridge that was to rise from this very spot.

When the sun came up Kitty sought for cover. An adjoining block still stood with little change, and the Royal Analostan retired to that. She knew some of its trails, but once there was unpleasantly surprised to find the place swarming with Cats that, like herself, were driven from their old grounds, and when the garbage-cans came out there were several Cats to each. It meant a famine in the land, and Pussy, after standing it a few days, set out to find her other home in Fifth Avenue. She got there to find it shut up and deserted, and the next night she returned to the crowded slum.

September and October wore away. Many of the Cats

died of starvation or were too weak to escape their natural enemies. But Kitty, young and strong, still lived.

Great changes had come over the ruined blocks. Though silent the night she saw them, they were crowded with noisy workmen all day. A tall building was completed by the end of October, and Slum Kitty, driven by hunger, went sneaking up to a pail that a negro had set outside. The pail, unfortunately, was not garbage, but a new thing in that region, a scrubbing-pail—a sad disappointment, but it had a sense of comfort: there was a trace of a familiar touch on the handle. While she was studying it the negro elevator boy came out again. In spite of his blue clothes his odorous person confirmed the good impression of the handle. Kitty had retreated across the street. He gazed at her.

“Sho ef dat don’t look like de Royal Ankalostan—Hya, Pussy—Pussy—Pussy—Pus-s-s-y, co-o-ome—Pus-s-s-y, hya! I specs she’s sho hungry.”

Hungry! She had not had a real meal for a month. The negro went into the hall and reappeared with a portion of his own lunch.

“Hya, Pussy, Puss—Puss—Puss.” At length he laid the meat on the pavement and went back to the door. Slum Kitty came, found it savoury; sniffed at the meat, seized it, and fled like a little Tigress to eat her prize in peace.

#### LIFE IV

This was the beginning of a new era. Pussy came to the door of the building now when pinched by hunger, and the good feeling for the negro grew. She had never understood that man before. Now he was her friend, the only one she had.

One week Pussy caught a Rat. She was crossing the street in front of the new building when her friend opened the door for a well-dressed man to come out.

“Hell, look at that for a Cat,” said the man.

“Yes, sah,” answered the negro; “dat’s ma Cat, sah; she’s

a terror on Rats, sah. Hez 'em 'bout cleaned up, sah; dat's why she so thin."

"Well, don't let her starve," said the man, with the air of a landlord. "Can't you feed her?"

"De liver-meat man comes reg'lar, sah, quatah dollar a week, sah," said the negro, realizing that he was entitled to the extra fifteen cents for "the idea."

"That's all right; I'll stand it."

Since then the negro has sold her a number of times with a perfectly clear conscience, because he knows quite well that it is only a question of a few days before the Royal Analostan comes back again. She has learned to tolerate the elevator and even to ride up and down on it. The negro stoutly maintains that once she heard the meat man while she was on the top floor and managed to press the button that called the elevator to take her down.

She is sleek and beautiful again. She is not only one of four hundred that form the inner circle about the liverman's barrow, but she is recognized as the star pensioner as well.

But in spite of her prosperity, her social position, her Royal name and fake pedigree, the greatest pleasure of her life is to slip out and go a-slumming in the gloaming, for now, as in her previous lives, she is at heart, and likely to be, nothing but a dirty little Slum Cat.

## *The Kitten's Tailor*

PEGGY BACON

ONCE THERE WAS A young tailor's apprentice with blue eyes and brown hair, who in due time became a tailor, and delightfully acquired a small shop of his own, with a green door and a shiny window and a real sign outside in red and gold. Inside this establishment were a small room with a counter, and a still smaller room with a shelf. And here when the day arrived came the tailor with a kitten and a thimble; and having arranged upon the shelf the mug and plate that were his, and the bowl that was the kitten's, he composed himself to wait for a customer.

It was not long before one came—a very grand gentleman—and the tailor's heart gave an important throb as he hurried in to take his first order. There was a fine suit to make, of white satin and silver lace, and the gentleman was eager to have it the day after next. So when he was gone, down sat the tailor to his work, and down sat the kitten beside him.

While his master was busy snipping, the kitten played with the thimble; what mattered it, since the tailor was not using it then? And when he finally needed it, the thimble was soon found. But when the young man began to sew, he could not help wishing that the kitten would not squeeze quite so close to his right elbow, though the little creature obviously sat there because of a very flattering interest in the work.

In fact, from time to time it would reach out a tentative paw towards the long thread with which the tailor was stitching. But the latter always managed to elude it until—quite suddenly—the kitten made a little lunge, caught the thread, and gave it such a pull that the seam puckered and the tailor must rip out and start afresh. Upon a repetition of this offence, he removed the animal to the back room.

But there the kitten felt so lonely and wailed so piteously that the tailor let him in again, rebuking it, however, with: "Crumpet, be good!" Whereat the kitten sat down at a little distance from the tailor and looked wistfully at the thread.

Noticing the disconsolate air of the kitten, the tailor tossed it an empty spool; and while Crumpet played, the young man worked on busily, letting his thoughts wander to the baker's daughter, who, for some inexplicable reason, refused to marry him. He had gone to see her only the day before, hoping that since he was become a real tailor with a new shop—and such a nice one—she would at last accept his proposals. But, though she admitted her love for him, she still refused, and he came away disappointed and puzzled.

The young man was soon roused from these thoughts by sounds from the table; and looking up, discovered to his excessive annoyance that Crumpet, having unwound a skein of silk, was at the moment engaged in tangling the silver lace. Dodging the now almost angry tailor with mischievous agility, the kitten sprang to the bale of white satin, swiftly sharpened its claws therein, and then rolled over on its back with disarming coyness, batting a derisive paw at his friend. But, steeling his heart, the latter opened the shop door, and depositing Crumpet with all possible gentleness in the street without, he returned hastily to his work. But as the day was chilly, Crumpet clambered on to the window-ledge, mewing sadly and pressing an impotent little nose against the pane; so that the tailor, conscience-stricken, opened the door and recalled the kitten, who charged in wildly, and then, recollecting itself, halted just in time to wash its face. After which, with an air of virtuous reform, it curled up in a corner and went to sleep.

The tailor surveyed his work. The suit was indeed barely started, owing to constant interruptions; and when he considered the bale of satin, pricked and pulled by the naughty claws, the silk hopelessly snarled, the silver lace torn and bitten, he was forced to admit that not much damage had been done that morning. And as it was now noon, he left

his work, laid out the mug, the plate and the bowl, and summoned Crumpet. Together they ate their meal of bread and milk, then speedily set to work again, the tailor endeavouring to make up for the loss of the morning, the kitten slyly rooting in the button-box, which, of course, soon upset, and cost the poor man some thirty minutes of angry grubbing.

During the remainder of the day the kitten was expelled from the room four times and four times recalled in recognition of its hearty protests. Its offences were varied, for it distributed its attentions impartially among the spools, the scissors and the beeswax, which last it evidently fancied edible, chewing it up very small and spitting it out disappointedly with much coughing and choking, thereby causing the tailor no little anxiety for its windpipe. The tray of pins that the tailor always kept within convenient reach was soon overturned, and the contents scattered far and wide. Indeed, if there had been six little kittens, the pins could not have been scattered further, for the tailor found them in the furthest recesses of the room.

It is hard to punish a fat little kitten—"And that kitten an orphan!" so thought the tailor with a sympathetic pang. And the end of the day found a very discouraged young man and a not very chastened puss. And as the occurrences of the first day were repeated the next, it is easy to see that the suit was not nearly ready when the fine gentleman called for it. Excuses were in vain; abuse was heaped on the head of the poor tailor, and the gentleman stormed himself off.

That evening the tailor faced the facts with a serious mind, and after a small struggle with himself, decided to give up the thought of being a tailor; and as a grocery is a pleasant place for a kitten, being always warm and full of amusement, he determined to turn grocer. Acting on this resolution, he sought out his uncle who owned a large grocery store in the next street. "Splendid!" cried the old man, upon hearing the tailor's plan. "I have long been wanting a partner in my business, and who could be a fitter one than my own nephew?"

And so the young tailor became a young grocer, and he and the kitten went to live in the grocery store. As they were both very fond of cheese, they easily reconciled themselves to the change, and very comfortable they were to be sure. Crumpet could sleep on the flour bags, on the counter, in the sunny window, or in his own soft basket behind the stove, and he soon cultivated a taste for dried fish. There were plenty of potatoes and walnuts for him to play with, and as he grew older he learned to appreciate the rats and mice.

As for the tailor, or rather the grocer, he presently plucked up courage to ask again for the plump hand of the baker's daughter, and this time to his great joy it was not denied him. "Now that you are a grocer, my love," cried she, "I have no objections at all; but I would never marry a tailor. To sit like a Turk is undignified and barbarous, and I have heard it makes them bowlegged." And so they were married.

## *Tobias.*

ALAN DEVOE

IT WAS A LITTLE after two o'clock this morning when Tobias wakened me. Tobias is a tiger tomcat who, despite the brushed gloss of his fur and the neatness of his arrogant whiskers, belongs to no one. His home is wherever the tamarack may be paw-patted into a bed, or wherever a deserted rabbit burrow may be scratched out from beneath the withered leaves.

Behind our farmhouse rises a little mountain, and in many a spot on it I have found the places of Tobias's day-sleeping hours. Once I found a deep curved depression under a cedar tree, with Tobias's droppings near it and a chipmunk skull half hidden in a clump of yellow violets close by. Another day I came upon signs that Tobias had been tenanting a woodchuck hole, and once, when we were making a clearing, we found his spoor deep in a thorny tangle of wild blackberry.

It is irresistible to use such words as "spoor" in speaking of Tobias, just as I have always thought of those day-sleeping places of his as "lair." Masterless and homeless probably from kittenhood, this midnight stalker of white-footed mice has become as crafty as any lynx or panther, as arrogant and mistrustful of mankind.

Like any of his wild feline cousins, whose coats are of a yellower shade but whose spirits would find their duplicate in Tobias's own, he chose the night hours, and those hours only, to "roar after his prey and seek his meat from God." Once or twice, walking over the hills in the late dusk, I have caught a glimpse of his long lithe body, stretched concealingly in the tall meadow grass and yarrow. At such times as this I have seen Tobias's yellow eyes turned upon me, for the split second before he whisked noiselessly into the underbrush, and I have been glad to be a man and not a mole.



Quite early in May, about the time when the earliest bloodroots were beginning to flower in hidden places, I surprised Tobias close to our rain barrel one night. I have forgotten for what reason I was prowling outdoors with my flashlight; as I stepped suddenly around the angle of the old stone wall, there was Tobias. He was not more than ten feet from me; I had never before been so close to him. I could see the small black lynx-tips at the points of his ears, and I marvelled to see that he kept himself as satiny and immaculate as any house pet. He had a tiny russet field mouse in his jaws, and, for the few seconds of his hypnosis in the beam of my light, he crouched perfectly motionless, glaring at me and making a deep steady growling noise in his throat. Then he turned and was gone. The ground was layered with the crackle-dry maple leaves of last autumn, but he did not make a sound.

It was about two o'clock this morning when I awoke with Tobias's yowling in my ears. During the winter and the spring we have often heard him at night—especially in the winter, when his cries would seem particularly penetrating in the still, frosty air—and on my morning walks I used sometimes to find in the light snow indications that starvation had driven him to filch the dry crusts of bread from my bird tray. But he had never made sufficient clamour to waken me thus from sound sleep.

I got out of bed and went to the north window and looked out. There was bright moonlight, and I could see the white trunks of our young birches gleaming where it touched them, and across the pasture I could see the glimmer of it in the brook. But I could not see Tobias. And then he cried out again and I followed the sound and saw him. He was crouching close beside the kitchen door, and he was snuffling and sniffing at the sill of it and rasping the screen with his powerful claws. How like a tiger he looked—an old tiger that had grown overbold and craved the taste of a new meat. For it was plain that his keen nostrils had caught a fresh and thrilling scent—the scent of a caged canary on the other side of that kitchen door. Tobias, Tobias, I thought, be those

curving claws of yours however sharp, they are no match for galvanized wire, and I went back to bed.

But it was not the smell of a new bird's blood that had brought Tobias here. This morning when I opened the door and looked out into the misty sunlight and saw that Tobias was still there—his lithe striped body stretched on the stone step, one keen curved claw still caught in the screen's mesh—I could guess the truth.

I could guess what extremity of pain had come to him in his lonely world among the tamaracks, and I could guess how, in the hour of his death, there had recurred in that furry skull of his some misty memory from very long ago—some memory, perhaps, of the rubbing of friendly human fingers under his chin, some memory of a quiet bowl of milk.

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## *Tobermory*

SAKI (H. H. MUNRO)

IT WAS A CHILL, rain-washed afternoon of a late August day, that indefinite season when partridges are still in the security of cold storage, and there is nothing to hunt—unless one is bounded on the north by the Bristol Channel, in which case one may lawfully gallop after fat red stags. Lady Blemley's house-party was not bounded on the north by the Bristol Channel, hence there was a full gathering of her guests round the tea-table on this particular afternoon. And, in spite of the blankness of the season and the triteness of the occasion, there was no trace in the company of that fatigued restlessness which means a dread of the pianola and a subdued hankering for auction bridge. The undisguised, open-mouthed attention of the entire party was fixed on the homely, negative personality of Mr. Cornelius Appin. Of all her guests, he was the one who had come to Lady Blemley with the vaguest reputation. Someone had said he was "clever," and he had got his invitation in the moderate expectation, on the part of his hostess, that some portion at least of his cleverness would be contributed to the general entertainment. Until tea-time that day she had been unable to discover in what direction, if any, his cleverness lay. He was neither a wit nor a croquet champion, a hypnotic force nor a begetter of amateur theatricals. Neither did his exterior suggest the sort of man in whom women are willing to pardon a generous measure of mental deficiency. He had subsided into mere Mr. Appin, and the Cornelius seemed a piece of transparent baptismal bluff. And now he was claiming to have launched on the world a discovery beside which the invention of gun powder, of the printing-press, and of steam locomotion were inconsiderable trifles. Science had made bewildering strides in many directions during recent decades, but this thing

seemed to belong to the domain of miracle rather than to scientific achievement.

"And do you really ask us to believe," Sir Wilfrid was saying, "that you have discovered a means for instructing animals in the art of human speech, and that dear old Tobermory has proved your first successful pupil?"

"It is a problem at which I have worked for the last seventeen years," said Mr. Appin, "but only during the last eight or nine months have I been rewarded with glimmerings of success. Of course I have experimented with thousands of animals, but latterly only with cats, those wonderful creatures which have assimilated themselves so marvellously with our civilization while retaining all their highly developed feral instincts. Here and there among cats one comes across an outstanding superior intellect, just as one does among the ruck of human beings, and when I made the acquaintance of Tobermory a week ago I saw at once that I was in contact with a 'Beyond-cat' of extraordinary intelligence. I had gone far along the road to success in recent experiments; with Tobermory, as you call him, I have reached the goal."

Mr. Appin concluded his remarkable statement in a voice which he strove to divest of a triumphant inflexion. No one said "Rats," though Clovis's lips moved in a monosyllabic contortion which probably invoked those rodents of disbelief.

"And do you mean to say," asked Miss Resker, after a slight pause, "that you have taught Tobermory to say and understand easy sentences of one syllable?"

"My dear Miss Resker," said the wonder-worker patiently, "one teaches little children and savages and backward adults in that piecemeal fashion; when one has once solved the problem of making a beginning with an animal of highly developed intelligence one has no need for those halting methods. Tobermory can speak our language with perfect correctness."

This time Clovis very distinctly said, "Beyond-rats!" Sir Wilfrid was more polite, but equally sceptical.

"Hadn't we better have the cat in and judge for ourselves?" suggested Lady Blemley.

Sir Wilfrid went in search of the animal, and the company settled themselves down to the languid expectation of witnessing some more or less adroit drawing-room ventriloquism.

In a minute Sir Wilfrid was back in the room, his face white beneath its tan and his eyes dilated with excitement.

"By Gad, it's true! "

His agitation was unmistakably genuine, and his hearers started forward in a thrill of awakened interest.

Collapsing into an armchair he continued breathlessly: "I found him dozing in the smoking-room, and called after him to come for his tea. He blinked at me in his usual way, and I said, 'Come on, Toby; don't keep us waiting;' and, by Gad! he drawled out in a most horribly natural voice, that he'd come when he dashed well pleased! I nearly jumped out of my skin! "

Appin had preached to absolutely incredulous hearers; Sir Wilfrid's statement carried instant conviction. A Babel-like chorus of startled exclamation arose, amid which the scientist sat mutely enjoying the first fruit of his stupendous discovery.

In the midst of the clamour Tobermory entered the room and made his way with velvet tread and studied unconcern across to the group seated round the tea-table.

A sudden hush of awkwardness and constraint fell on the company. Somehow there seemed an element of embarrassment in addressing on equal terms a domestic cat of acknowledged mental ability.

"Will you have some milk, Tobermory?" asked Lady Blemley in a rather strained voice.

"I don't mind if I do," was the response, couched in a tone of even indifference. A shiver of suppressed excitement went through the listeners, and Lady Blemley might be excused for pouring out the saucerful of milk rather unsteadily.

"I am afraid I have spilt a good deal of it," she said apologetically.

"After all, it's not my Axminster," was Tobermory's rejoinder.

Another silence fell on the group, and then Miss Resker, in her best district-visitor manner, asked if the human language had been difficult to learn. Tobermory looked squarely at her for a moment and then fixed his gaze serenely on the middle distance. It was obvious that boring questions lay outside his scheme of life.

"What do you think of human intelligence?" asked Mavis Pellington lamely.

"Of whose intelligence in particular?" asked Tobermory coldly.

"Oh, well, mine for instance," said Mavis, with a feeble laugh.

"You put me in an embarrassing position," said Tobermory, whose tone and attitude certainly did not suggest a shred of embarrassment. "When your inclusion in this house party was suggested, Sir Wilfrid protested that you were the most brainless woman of his acquaintance, and that there was a wide distinction between hospitality and the care of the feeble-minded. Lady Blemley replied that your lack of brain-power was the precise quality which had earned you your invitation, as you were the only person she could think of who might be idiotic enough to buy their old car. You know, the one they call 'The Envy of Sisyphus,' because it goes quite nicely uphill if you push it."

Lady Blemley's protestations would have had greater effect if she had not casually suggested to Mavis only that morning that the car in question would be just the thing for her down at her Devonshire home.

Major Barfield plunged in heavily to effect a diversion.

"How about your carryings-on with the tortoise-shell puss up at the stables, eh?"

The moment he had said it everyone realized the blunder.

"One does not usually discuss these matters in public," said Tobermory frigidly. "From a slight observation of your ways since you've been in this house I should imagine

you'd find it inconvenient if I were to shift the conversation on to your own little affairs."

The panic which ensued was not confined to the Major.

"Would you like to go and see if cook has got your dinner ready?" suggested Lady Blemley hurriedly, affecting to ignore the fact that it wanted at least two hours to Tobermory's dinner-time.

"Thanks," said Tobermory, "not quite so soon after my tea. I don't want to die of indigestion."

"Cats have nine lives, you know," said Sir Wilfrid heartily.

"Possibly," answered Tobermory; "but only one liver."

"Adelaide!" said Mrs. Cornett, "do you mean to encourage that cat to go out and gossip about us in the servants' hall?"

The panic had indeed become general. A narrow ornamental balustrade ran in front of most of the bedroom windows at the Towers, and it was recalled with dismay that this had formed a favourite promenade for Tobermory at all hours, whence he could watch the pigeons—and heaven knew what else besides. If he intended to become reminiscent in his present outspoken strain the effect would be something more than disconcerting. Mrs. Cornett, who spent much time at her toilet table, and whose complexion was reputed to be of a nomadic though punctual disposition, looked as ill at ease as the Major. Miss Scrawen, who wrote fiercely sensuous poetry and led a blameless life, merely displayed irritation; if you are methodical and virtuous in private you don't necessarily want everyone to know it. Bertie van Tahn, who was so depraved at seventeen that he had long ago given up trying to be any worse, turned a dull shade of gardenia white, but he did not commit the error of dashing out of the room like Odo Finsberry, a young gentleman who was understood to be reading for the Church and who was possibly disturbed at the thought of scandals he might hear concerning other people. Clovis had the presence of mind to maintain a composed exterior; privately he was calculating how long it would take to

procure a box of fancy mice through the agency of the *Exchange and Mart* as a species of hush-money.

Even in a delicate situation like the present, Agnes Resker could not endure to remain too long in the background.

"Why did I ever come down here?" she asked dramatically. Tobermory immediately accepted the opening.

"Judging by what you said to Mrs. Cornett on the croquet lawn yesterday, you were out for food. You described the Blemleys as the dullest people to stay with that you knew, but said they were clever enough to employ a first-rate cook; otherwise they'd find it difficult to get anyone to come down a second time."

"There's not a word of truth in it! I appeal to Mrs. Cornett—" exclaimed the discomfited Agnes.

"Mrs. Cornett repeated your remark afterwards to Bertie van Tahn," continued Tobermory, "and said, 'That woman is a regular Hunger Marcher; she'd go anywhere for four square meals a day,' and Bertie van Tahn said—"

At this point the chronicle mercifully ceased. Tobermory had caught a glimpse of the big yellow Tom from the Rectory working his way through the shrubbery towards the stable wing. In a flash he had vanished through the open French window.

With the disappearance of his too brilliant pupil Cornelius Appin found himself beset by a hurricane of bitter upbraiding, anxious inquiry, and frightened entreaty. The responsibility for the situation lay with him, and he must prevent matters from becoming worse. Could Tobermory impart his dangerous gift to other cats? was the first question he had to answer. It was possible, he replied, that he might have initiated his intimate friend the stable puss into his new accomplishment, but it was unlikely that his teaching could have taken a wider range as yet.

"Then," said Mrs. Cornett, "Tobermory may be a valuable cat and a great pet; but I'm sure you'll agree, Adelaide, that both he and the stable cat must be done away with without delay."

"You don't suppose I've enjoyed the last quarter of an



hour, do you?" said Lady Blemley bitterly. "My husband and I are very fond of Tobermory—at least, we were before this horrible accomplishment was infused into him; but now, of course, the only thing is to have him destroyed as soon as possible."

"We can put some strychnine in the scraps he always gets at dinner-time," said Sir Wilfrid, "and I will go and drown the stable cat myself. The coachman will be very sore at losing his pet, but I'll say a very catching form of mange has broken out in both cats and we're afraid of it spreading to the kennels."

"But my great discovery!" expostulated Mr. Appin; "after all my years of research and experiment—"

"You can go and experiment on the short-horns at the farm, who are under proper control," said Mrs. Cornett, "or the elephants at the Zoological Gardens. They're said to be highly intelligent, and they have this recommendation, that they don't come creeping about our bedrooms and under chairs, and so forth."

An archangel ecstatically proclaiming the Millennium, and then finding that it clashed unpardonably with Henley and would have to be indefinitely postponed, could hardly have felt more crestfallen than Cornelius Appin at the reception of his wonderful achievement. Public opinion, however, was against him—in fact, had the general voice been consulted on the subject it is probable that a strong minority vote would have been in favour of including him in the strychnine diet.

Defective train arrangements and a nervous desire to see matters brought to a finish prevented an immediate dispersal of the party, but dinner that evening was not a social success. Sir Wilfrid had had rather a trying time with the stable cat and subsequently with the coachman. Agnes Resker ostentatiously limited her repast to a morsel of dry toast, which she bit as though it were a personal enemy; while Mavis Pellington maintained a vindictive silence throughout the meal. Lady Blemley kept up a flow of what she hoped was conversation, but her attention was fixed

on the doorway. A plateful of carefully dosed fish scraps was in readiness on the sideboard, but sweets and savoury and dessert went their way, and no Tobermory appeared either in the dining-room or kitchen.

The sepulchral dinner was cheerful compared with the subsequent vigil in the smoking-room. Eating and drinking had at least supplied a distraction and cloak to the prevailing embarrassment. Bridge was out of the question in the general tension of nerves and tempers, and after Odo Finsberry had given a lugubrious rendering of "Melisande in the Wood" to a frigid audience, music was tacitly avoided. At eleven the servants went to bed, announcing that the small window in the pantry had been left open as usual for Tobermory's private use. The guests read steadily through the current batch of magazines, and fell back gradually on the "Badminton Library" and bound volumes of *Punch*. Lady Blemley made periodic visits to the pantry, returning each time with an expression of listless depression which forestalled questioning.

At two o'clock Clovis broke the dominating silence.

"He won't turn up to-night. He's probably in the local newspaper office at the present moment, dictating the first instalment of his reminiscences. Lady What's-her-name's book won't be in it. It will be the event of the day."

Having made this contribution to the general cheerfulness, Clovis went to bed. At long intervals the various members of the house party followed his example.

The servants taking round the early tea made a uniform announcement in reply to a uniform question. Tobermory had not returned.

Breakfast was, if anything, a more unpleasant function than dinner had been, but before its conclusion the situation was relieved. Tobermory's corpse was brought in from the shrubbery, where a gardener had just discovered it. From the bites on his throat and the yellow fur which coated his claws it was evident that he had fallen in unequal combat with the big Tom from the Rectory.

By midday most of the guests had quitted the Towers,

and after lunch Lady Blemley had sufficiently recovered her spirits to write an extremely nasty letter to the Rectory about the loss of her valuable pet.

Tobermory had been Appin's one successful pupil, and he was destined to have no successor. A few weeks later an elephant in the Dresden Zoological Garden, which had shown no previous signs of irritability, broke loose and killed an Englishman who had apparently been teasing it. The victim's name was variously reported in the papers as Oppin and Eppelin, but his front name was faithfully rendered Cornelius.

"If he was trying German irregular verbs on the poor beast," said Clovis, "he deserved all he got."

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## *The Birthday Present*

M. MACKENZIE SCOTT

IT WAS MICI'S thirteenth birthday.

As Mici was not a happy little girl, but a decrepit, rather mangy, ginger-coloured cat, she did not know what a birthday was; and her own instinctive method of counting did not include names for the few numbers she recognised. But the words "thirteenth birthday" were repeatedly shouted in her ear at an early hour of the morning when her mistress, the Caretaker of the old house in Buda, caught her out of her basket and pressed her to her bosom in a very uncomfortable attitude. But Mici was used to uncomfortable attitudes, and to temperamental outbursts of affection.

"Oh, my sweet, my darling! Mother's own puss! It's her thirteenth birthday, and mother's got a beautiful present for her!"

Mici was pressed, kneaded, shaken, and held up in the air many times to the accompaniment of joyful moans, before she reached her basket again.

"Thirteen years she has been Mother's comfort," chanted the Caretaker, as she slapped about tidying the bedroom with a great deal of noise. "Thirteen years ago today my own Mici was born at four o'clock in the afternoon, and I held poor Cilli's paw until it was all over."

The Caretaker swooped down on the basket again, and the old cat was deprived of her equilibrium, and lay waving her legs like an overturned insect, for her agility had left her long ago. Her mistress hung over the basket, stroking and slapping her absent-mindedly. Her ageing face was pretty with rouge and powder, and her teeth were repaired with much gold; pearls like small moons were attached to her ear-lobes, and a red cotton handkerchief covered her hair.

"Poor Mici's a widow," the Caretaker chanted, "but she hasn't forgotten her Max, has she? She hasn't forgotten her poor old Max who was killed by a wicked dog—hi, Teri! The milk is burning!"

The Caretaker rushed into her little kitchen, banging the bedroom door behind her; and released from her importunate hands and voice Mici slowly recovered her bearings. After glancing round the room and listening to the voices in the kitchen next door for a moment, she began her morning toilette. The first gesture was a desultory lick or two on the white fur of her forelegs and chest. When she had, so to speak, settled down to her work, she gave her right paw a thorough cleaning, both outside and in, stretching her claws and laboriously biting the dusty tufts of fur between them, and combing the hairs out with her old blunt teeth. When she considered that her paw was in order, she damped it with her tongue and applied it to her right temple, digging into her eye somewhat clumsily in a way that made her wince once or twice. The circle was soon enlarged to include her nose, which with all the weight of her years had remained the small, engaging white button it had been in her kittenhood. Very soon her paw was going over her ear; but this was not a strenuous matter, for part of the ear had been bitten off by a dog in the days of her youth. The torn tips of the ear were brushed neatly, and the peeled walnut inside it was rubbed and polished with a great deal of care. After that Mici paused, and drew deep relieving breaths while she stared at the leg of the table beside her with blank, golden eyes.

When the long sweep of her back had been dusted, and the intimate details of her toilette accomplished, she stepped carefully out of her basket and crossed the floor to the open window. Jumping on to a chair she looked out through the wire-netting that covered the opening. She disliked the wire-netting, because it caught her claws when she tried to put her paw through it; and if she put her nose into one of the holes her whiskers were interfered with. In her

mind still lurked a faint remembrance of sitting freely in the sun on the window sill with the old tomcat, Max, who had been her companion for years. But she did not know how long ago that had been, nor did she connect the wire-netting with the disappearance of Max.

Mici felt rather drowsy after her exertions, but her mistress was sweeping the courtyard with a long broom made of willow twigs, and her quick sprightly movements held Mici's attention.

"Hi, Teri! Come and clean the canary!" she shouted to her sister, dancing the dust out of the corners.

"Yes, yes," piped a voice from the kitchen, and Teri appeared in the courtyard.

She was a frail little creature, with a trailing skirt. A blue cloth was bound round her head. Her eyes showed the patience and anxiety of those to whom both speaking and hearing are difficult.

"It's the last day I've got to work for the Baroness," the Caretaker grumbled, as Teri shook out the canary's tray. "Nobody would put up with her nagging and her meanness, but I did want to give darling Mici the present."

Behind the wire-netting Mici opened her eyes at the sound of her name.

"Twenty *pengö* is precious little for washing dishes and scrubbing floors every afternoon for a month, but when the man said it would be twenty *pengö* I said he could do it, and I'd earn the money somehow."

The Cobbler who lived in the courtyard appeared in his doorway. He was a fat elderly man with a pink face, and red hair that was turning grey.

"Well, what about the birthday present?" he asked jovially.

"The man is going to bring it at half-past five," said the Caretaker out of her clouds of dust.

The Cobbler put his hands on his thighs and stepped after her over the cobblestones. As she turned her pretty painted face towards him, wielding her broom, he looked

at her with the eyes of a fish, and striking an attitude started to sing.

*"I love you, my only flower,  
I love you as I love nobody  
In this great world."*

The Caretaker shrieked with laughter.

"You amorous boy!" she cried, pushing him in the small of the back with her broom.

Glumly the Cobbler returned to his doorway. "*Ej, haj,*" he sighed, suddenly wrapped in deep melancholy, "there's nothing like love!"

The Caretaker threw her broom on to an empty flower-bed beside the wall, and clattered into her kitchen. Very soon Teri followed her. There was nothing in the courtyard to disturb Mici's doze except the voice of the canary trilling in the sunshine; and to that she had long grown accustomed.

Towards midday she was awakened by a noise that confused her. For a moment, when she opened her eyes, she did not know where she was. The Caretaker was running in and out of the room, setting saucers on the floor near the basket; and from the outcry, and the variety of smells, Mici knew that her dinner was to be something very special indeed. But when she was getting up to inspect it the Caretaker swooped down on her and lifted her on to her knee.

"My Mici must be smart on her thirteenth birthday," she crooned, beginning to tie a piece of blue ribbon round Mici's neck. "Always my respectable Mici. No wicked ways. No sneaking out in the night. It's your respectability that has kept you young, Mici! And now you are ready for your birthday dinner."

The Caretaker jumped up and the old cat plumped on to the floor near the row of saucers, and stood taciturnly recovering her physical and mental poise before sniffing out the most delectable odour.

When the silence of afternoon had fallen on the house,

and the Caretaker had gone off to char for the Baroness, Teri opened the door of the bedroom. Mici was waiting beside it, licking the after-tastes of her dinner from her white chops and chin, and she slipped past Teri quite quickly in her haste to get out into the sun. In the middle of the courtyard she sat down and twitched the point of her tail to show her independence; her haste had really been needless, for Teri was a poor creature, and could not have kept her back. She felt vaguely annoyed by the bunch of blue ribbon, which was hanging under her chin, and tried to pull it off with her paw. But her efforts to dislodge the bow were useless, and presently she lifted a hind leg and scratched it till it moved slowly round to the back of her ear. When this moderate relief had been accomplished Mici looked up and all around her, waiting for the magnetic inspiration that would decide for her what she was going to do.

Up above her the canary trilled with abandon, and the Cobbler sat in his open doorway, hammering the wooden heel of a shoe. Mici glided over the cobblestones and put her head cautiously round the door.

"Hi, Mici!" called the Cobbler, as he went on tapping. "You don't know what is in store for you, you old rascal. Ha, ha, ha! You are going to get a present that will make the fur rise on your mangy old head."

Mici drew the threatened head cautiously back from the doorway. Although she did not know what the Cobbler had predicted, she felt that she had had quite enough of him. She glided along by the wall and turned into the corridor that led to the street; it was narrow, and two doors faced each other in its centre. One of the doors was ajar, and Mici stopped and approached her whiskers to the opening.

"Go away, you dirty animal!" a girl's voice cried out. "Don't dare to come into my kitchen! Go away!"

A broom came through the aperture so suddenly that it hit Mici's chest, and made her move sideways with unusual alertness. The door on the other side opened, and a fat



woman with a cloth on her head looked out. She was a news vendor, and lodged in the single room on that side.

"Poor Mici, poor old cat!" she cried in a consoling sing-song. "Don't they like you then? Miscalling you, are they?"

The girl with the broom pushed open her door. She was a tall young creature with a pale, morose face; a bride of a few weeks whose eyelids were always reddened with weeping.

"I won't have that dirty old animal in my kitchen!" she said defiantly. "It ought to be got rid of. It isn't healthy to have it about."

Nervous tears came into her eyes as she spoke, and the fat woman looked her over with a pitying motherly eye.

"Come into my room, my dear," she said kindly, "and I'll turn on the radio. It will do you good to hear a bit of music and look at a picture paper."

Mici turned and stole back along the corridor to the curving stairs that led up to the single flat on the first floor. At the top of the stairs the glass front door was shut; but that was no obstacle to Mici. She flattened her body and pulled herself between two of the bars of the grille which separated the stairs from the gallery. Avoiding the inner part of the flat, where she knew by experience that strangers—and often unamenable strangers—were lodging, she passed the kitchen and stepped on to the little terrace which formed the roof of the Caretaker's house. The terrace was a dirty place, with dilapidated flowers growing in small beds in its corners, and faded photographs in frames covered with shells decorating its walls. A rotting plank, dotted with mounds of cooked food for the birds, was laid near the railing through which one could look into the courtyard. At the side of the terrace a large wooden case was kept half-full of manure which was meant to improve the earth of the flowerbeds; and on this case the tenant of the flat was taking his afternoon nap. Mici was used to the sight of his bald head resting on a mat on the top of the box, and to the movement of his grey

moustache, which followed the rhythm of his snores. As she crept up to the box she noticed a few flies playing around his drawn-up knees. She stood motionless for a second or two, till one of them settled on the grey stuff of his trousers; then she lifted her paw and struck it.

"Hi!" shouted the old man, awakened by the prick on his knee. "Go away, Mici! Go away, you old pest!"

He sat up and trampled loudly on the terrace floor, tapping the box with his empty pipe; and Mici retired backwards in haste to hide by the gallery railings. But when he had settled down to sleep she came back again, and sat watching the flies dance about him. One fly would walk over his bald pink head from his eyebrows right down to the nape of his neck, and then rise with a jubilant note of achievement to begin the journey all over again. The sight of the minute black moving body awakened a strange excitement in Mici's breast; the point of her tail writhed, and at last she could bear it no longer. She raised her paw and struck out at the bald pink head.

"Oh, *Istenem*—my God!" cried the old man. "Is there to be no rest for a man on his own terrace? The pig of a cat won't let me sleep!"

Grumbling and rubbing the back of his head he ambled off into the kitchen, and according to the contrariety of her feline nature, Mici immediately lost her interest in flies. She turned round, and pulling her forces together, jumped on to the solitary chair which the terrace contained. It was an old straw thing, blackened and battered by the elements, and there was a hole in the middle of the seat; but Mici was accustomed to balancing herself on its edge, and she took up her favourite position with her legs folded under her body.

The October sunshine poured down on the terrace. Down below, in the courtyard, the Cobbler sang at his work, and the canary trilled and burred in frenzied anxiety to drown his voice. Encouraged by the stillness on the terrace sparrows hopped down from the roof and began to peck at the food on the board. Mici watched them, motionless,

with inscrutable eyes, as they quarrelled and twittered near the railing, and chased each other off the pots of Michaelmas daisies. She was much too old to hunt them now. Presently she looked up at the sky and saw swallows exercising their wings for the autumn flight. A blackbird was sitting on the rim of a chimney-pot, tweaking its tail and looking down the dark funnel. Long ago Mici had glided over the tiles, watching the swallows dart and dip, and catching an unwary sparrow, now and then, in the water-pipe. She had crept along the spine of the house on her belly, and had often come quite close to the impertinent blackbirds that perched on the chimney-pots.

As she stared upward the remembrance of these things was less a picture in her mind than a consciousness in the ageing muscles of her body. Her eyes closed once or twice as she looked at the swallows, and at last she bent her head with a solemn movement and drew her legs tighter beneath her body. One by one the sparrows dropped off the ledge of the terrace, and her head began to nod gently like the head of a very old woman. She could no longer leap on the sparrows or jump as high as the overhanging tiles; but she could still feel the elation in her nerves of the lithe upward flight, and effortless alighting.

When the sun was getting low she was awakened by the sound of footsteps on the gallery. She rose uneasily, to be ready for what was coming. A woman passed the kitchen door and came on to the terrace, and Mici knew that the woman was a stranger while she was still a few feet away, because her coat smelt sweetish and new. The coats of the people in the courtyard smelt of rancid fat and tomato soup or tobacco; sometimes they smelt the same as the grating at the edge of the pavement outside the house. When the stranger came close to her Mici looked up into her face, and the stranger looked down at her and murmured a single word. Mici did not know what the word signified, but it filled her with sudden and inexplicable ecstasy. She knew that she must not rub her head on the stranger's coat—she had learned it by sad experience from

women whose coats smelt new—so with quivering paws she began to shred out the straw from the seat of the chair, purring loudly with uplifted nose. The myriad electrical conductors of her senses assured her that the stranger was benign, well disposed towards her, and able to provide mysterious and undefinable boons. As her purring grew sharp with expectation, and her claws tore the straw seat faster and faster, she heard the door of the flat click open, and her mistress's steps coming over the gallery.

"Mici, Mici!" called the Caretaker, when she reached the terrace.

Mici jumped off the chair and ran towards the stranger. Instinct told her that if she stayed with the stranger she would be safe and comfortable, and the daily afflictions would go out of her life; and as she tried to hide behind the stranger's ankles she could not resist letting her tail curl round the heel of one of her shoes.

"Is she your cat?" the stranger asked the Caretaker, looking down at Mici.

"Yes, my lady. Thirteen years I've had her—it's her birthday today." The Caretaker was smiling. "A more respectable cat never lived, my lady; she only had a kitten once in her life and she seemed quite shocked at the poor little thing—come, Mici, come downstairs with Mother!"

In vain Mici tried to avoid capture by circling round the stranger's feet; fate, which for her always meant some human being, was inexorable. The stranger laughed and stepped aside, the Caretaker pounced, and with legs waving helplessly and tail twitching mutinously, Mici was carried downstairs.

In the courtyard the fat Newspaper-woman was talking to Teri. A folded handkerchief was tied under her chin, and she wore a bright green woollen jacket that gaped widely between the buttons, for she was going out with the evening papers in half an hour.

"I've been telling Teri about that poor young creature," she said, following the Caretaker into her house. "She's an orphan, and she hadn't a thing but her clothes when

she married him. *He* bought the furniture, and he doesn't give her peace, one way or another."

"You don't say," the Caretaker assented in a preoccupied tone, and cast Mici into her basket. "Here he is;" she cried, glancing at the window and clasping her hands. "He has brought it at last!"

Mici sat up and licked a hair or two on her chest; then she scratched the blue bow to the back of her neck. Her temper was beginning to be unsettled. She felt the day had already held more than its share of abrupt transitions. There was too much coming and going for her taste, and she stared at the strange man in the doorway with the slit pupils of animosity.

"Good-day, Missus. I've brought the work, as I promised. Looks very nice, I must say."

The man began to unwrap the large parcel he was carrying, but the Caretaker stopped him.

"I don't want her to see it in bits," she said excitedly. "She must see it all at once, when it's out of the paper. I'll unpack it behind the bed."

The man drew a piece of soiled paper out of his pocket.

"Twenty *pengö* we agreed on," he said, and handed it to her.

The Caretaker opened a drawer and took out her shabby purse. She sniffed as she counted the money on to the man's grimy palm. Two large pieces of silver, and ten smaller coins; it was all that the purse contained.

"Thank you, Missus, that's right," the man said, dropping the money into his pocket. "If you want *that* done any time," he added, pointing a stubby forefinger at Mici, "I'd do it for fifteen *pengö* for you."

The fat Newspaper-woman began to giggle as the man left the room, and the Caretaker went down on her knees to unpack the parcel behind the bed.

"Mici's present is here!" she called through the window to the Cobbler on the opposite side of the courtyard. "Come and see it!"

Sitting up in her basket Mici grew visibly thinner; her

golden eyes glanced from point to point in the room. Her acute, almost supernatural, senses had informed her that something strange and terrible was near. What it was she did not know, and where it was she was also, as yet, unaware; but the dawning of fear was making all sounds and sights strange to her—the rustling of paper at the end of the bed, the Newspaper-woman's giggles, the leg of the table beside her basket, and the empty coalscuttle gaping beside the door. She cast a lowering glance at the Cobbler who appeared in the doorway; but her fear was not connected with him, nor with Teri, who came in behind him. She had never seen so many people in the small room before, nor heard so much laughter, and the nerves of her skin began to be active.

"Here is your birthday present," the Caretaker cried, sitting down on the floor beside Mici's basket. "Here is your own Max come back to my Mici. Look at him, Mici! He looks just as if he were alive."

Mici looked at the thing on the floor before her, and each separate hair on her body began to move. The thing looked like Max, but it did not smell like Max. It glared at her with glinting terrible eyes—their immobility held a menace she could not endure—and the smell of it was more deadly, more suggestive than anything Mici had ever known. For a moment her being remained suspended and motionless; then her agony burst out in a screech. Spitting and spluttering, she shuffled backwards over the edge of her basket, and tried to jump on to the bed. But she miscalculated the distance, and slid back to the floor, dragging the bedcover down with her claws.

"Oh, *Istenem*, my Mici!" wailed the Caretaker. "She is frightened of Max!"

She tried to disentangle the cat from the bedcover, but Mici struggled and fixed her teeth in her hand. The Caretaker dropped her with a cry, and Mici leaped on to the bed again, rushed over the pillows, and pulling her failing forces together landed screeching on top of the wardrobe.

Pandemonium reigned down below her.

"What is going on?" the Coalheaver asked through the open window. He was taking the weekly load of wood upstairs, and had heard the din in the courtyard.

"Oh, *Istenem*, she's mad—Mici's mad!" Teri twittered with trembling hands; she looked like a frightened gnome with her turbaned head and her trailing skirt.

"Throw a pail of water over her!" cried the Newspaper-woman. "It's the only thing to do when they go mad!"

"My poor darling," moaned the Caretaker, "it's her thirteenth birthday and I wanted to give her a treat."

"I'll get her!" cried the Cobbler, rushing a chair towards the wardrobe.

Mici spat, and her eyes gleamed red on the top of the wardrobe, and nobody remembered to say that the chair had a mended leg. The Cobbler jumped on to it, the leg gave way, and in trying to keep his balance he put his foot through the thin wooden seat. Loud screams from the women accompanied the crash.

"*Jézus Mária!*" The Coalheaver prayed richly and appreciatively, pressing his round dusky face to the wire netting.

"I'll get her down," the Cobbler said in a sinister tone.

He pushed back the women, looking red and angry, and went out rubbing himself in the rear. In a few seconds he came back with a pail full of water and a long-handled brush.

"Taking a broom to my Mici!" wailed the Caretaker, wringing her hands.

"Better hide the stuffed cat," prompted the Coalheaver, changing his vantage point outside the window.

Teri picked up Max from the floor and hid him away in a drawer.

"Now," said the Cobbler, setting down the pail near the wardrobe. "Stand back!"

He caught the broom in the middle with one hand, and lifted it over his head like a spear. As the bristles came over the rim of Mici's hiding-place she began to splutter anew and to wrestle with them. The Cobbler dragged the

broom from one side to the other, for he did not want Mici to come down on his head. When she leaped away suddenly the handle of the broom jerked backwards and smashed the frail glass of the hanging lamp.

"There goes a *pengö*!" cried the Coalheaver, doubling up outside the window.

"Don't bark at me, you tramp!" the Cobbler shouted in the midst of his travail. "If you do I'll give you something to bark at!"

"Stand on this," said the Newspaper-woman, pushing a kitchen stool towards him. "It's steady," she gasped, wiping tears of laughter from her eyes with the back of her hand.

The Cobbler stepped on to the stool. He could not see Mici, for dusk was deepening in the room, and she was crouching far back by the wall; but when he felt the broom touch a resistant body he uttered a shout of rage and triumph, and dislodged an old kitchen clock which had lain there forgotten for years. As the clock splashed down into the waiting pail the joy of the Coalheaver filled the courtyard. The Caretaker started to cry; and Teri set about mopping up the water with a frightened face. The Cobbler gave the clock a single glance, and then with the strength of his fury he beat the top of the wardrobe till the broom fell on Mici. With a wild sweep he sent her hurtling down on to the bed. As she landed on her back, limp and spiritless now, he seized her by the scruff of the neck, and ducking her twice in what remained of the water, threw her out on the floor with the final remark, "That's done!"

Tears streamed down the Caretaker's face as she caught Mici up in a towel and began to dry her wet fur. The old cat lay in her arms without moving, and sometimes light shivers rippled over her body.

"Perhaps she'll be all right when she gets dry," the Newspaper-woman said doubtfully, bending down to inspect the cat's eyes and teeth. "She's not mad, she's only had a bad fright." She shook her head disapprovingly. "A



month's work for that thing!" she added. "It wasn't a lucky bargain."

She turned and hurried from the room, for it was time to set off on her evening rounds. Teri carried the pail out into the courtyard, and returned to fold a warm shawl about her shoulders; for she, too, must start out for her evening's work. Outside, in the courtyard, the Cobbler and the Coalheaver exchanged a few pungent phrases before they parted.

When all was quiet the Caretaker laid Mici in her basket, and tucked a piece of flannel round her to keep her warm. Then she lifted the basket and carried it out to the doorstep, and sat down beside it in the mild autumn dusk. The Cobbler's lamp shone out on the opposite side of the courtyard, and once more his hammer began to tap. Above the old chimneys a star swam up, and suddenly, gently, the colour faded out of the sky. The Caretaker sobbed on and on in her apron, gulping "Poor Mici—poor, poor Mici!" in the midst of her tears. But at last she wiped her weebegone face, and leaned her head against the wooden frame of the doorway.

"Oh, *Istenem*—my God!" she whispered to herself in the darkness. "Twenty *pengö*! And I need a new pair of shoes so badly!"

In the basket beside her the old cat lay motionless, for the shivers had stopped troubling her stiffening limbs.

## Cat's Cruise

MAZO DE LA ROCHE

CAT WAS AS BLACK as a crow. This very blackness made her presence desired by sailors, who were sure it brought them good luck. She was not pretty, but she had charm which she had spent her life in exercising, to get what she wanted. She was eight years old, and she had woven into that eight years more travel and more adventure than most humans achieve in eighty. She had also brought forty-five kittens into the world.

She had been born on board a coaling vessel, the *Sultara*, in the midst of a terrible storm when the crew thought that every moment would be their last. Her mother was ginger-coloured; and she had, while the vessel floundered in distress, produced three ginger-coloured kittens besides this last one, black as the coal which formed the cargo. The stoker, looking gloomily at their squirming bodies, had growled:

"There'll be no need for us to drown *them*. The bloomin' sea'll do it!"

He picked up the black midget and held it in his hand. He felt an instant's compassion for it. It had come out of darkness and was so soon to return; yet there it lay, curved in his palm, bullet-headed, its intricate mechanism of tiny organs and delicate bones padded with good flesh, the flesh covered by thick silky fur, the whole animated by a spirit so vigorous that already ten little claws made themselves felt on his palm.

"If I could find a bottle the right size," he said, "I'd put you into it and chuck you into the sea. I'll bet you'd get to land!"

But there was no need to try the experiment. Miraculously, it seemed, the storm began to abate. The waves subsided; the vessel was got under control. One and all

declared that they had been saved by the timely birth of the black kitten. It became the mascot, the idol of the ship.

They could not agree on a name for it. Some wanted a simple one, easy to say and descriptive of its colour, such as Smut, Darkie, Jet or Nigger. Others insisted on some name which would suggest the rescue of their lives by the kitten's timely birth. One offered Nick-o'-Time, with Nick for short. But they could not agree. Then someone called her simply "Cat," and the others, in spite of themselves, acquiesced, as is often the case with names. From then on she was proudly, affectionately, known as "Cat" wherever she went.

She had a very round head, with small ears and narrow, clear green eyes. She had exceptionally long, glossy whiskers above a large mouth that displayed needle-sharp teeth in a three-cornered smile or a ferocious grin when her emotions were stirred. Her tail was sleek and sinuous and almost never still. Happy was the sailor round whose neck she wound it. Her attentions were known to bring good luck.

As she grew up she reigned supreme on the vessel. Nothing was too good for her. If what she wanted was not given her at once, she climbed on to the neck of the man who withheld it and put both arms (you could not call them forelegs, because she used them exactly like arms) round his neck and peered into his eyes out of the narrow green slits of her own. If he did not at once surrender, she pressed her stubby nose on first one side of his face, then on the other, while with her claws she massaged the weatherbeaten back of his neck. If he were still obdurate, or perhaps mischievous enough still to deny her, she reversed her position and put her claws into his thigh. Gladly he gave her then whatever she desired.

She had a loud vibrant purr, and when she moved gracefully along whatever deck she was favouring with her presence, purring and swaying her long tail, a feeling of reassurance and tranquillity came to all on board.... It was a bitter thing to the crew of the coaling vessel on

which she had been born when, at the time of her first litter, she deserted them for a Norwegian schooner. The captain could scarcely persuade the crew to sail. The docks at Liverpool were combed for her without success. The voyage was one of rough weather and general dissatisfaction.

At that time the Norwegians had not heard of her. They had their own cat, and did not want another. But she soon won them over, and they had the most successful voyage they had ever known. When they next called at Liverpool, the mate boasted of Cat in the hearing of one of the crew of the *Sultara*. He boasted of her intelligence, of her blackness, of the luck she brought.

On board the *Sultara* there was joy when they learned that she was safe, rage when they heard that she was living with the Norwegians. They visited the foreigners and saw for themselves the cat was "Cat." They found that she had a litter of ginger-coloured kittens. But the Norwegians would not give her up. They would give up one or all of her ginger-coloured litter, but they would not give up "Katts."

The crew of the *Sultara* hung about the docks with scraps of kipper in their pockets, because Cat had a weakness for kippers; but the Norwegians guarded Katt with terrible efficiency. When, however, she chose to go ashore, nothing could stop her. A morsel of kipper was proffered her at the right moment. She mounted the shoulder of the giver, and was borne in triumph to her birthplace. She gave evidence of the greatest pleasure in her reunion with the crew, who were ready to weep with joy at recovering her.

Cat remained with them for two voyages. Then again she disappeared, this time in favour of an oil tanker bound for the East. . . . And so it went on, this life of change and adventure. She chose her ships. She remained on them till her love of variety prompted her to seek another lodging. But wherever she sailed, she brought good luck, and at regular intervals she returned to the *Sultara*. On all the Seven Seas she produced litters of ginger or grey

kittens, but never one of her own glittering black. She held herself unique. She was Cat.

Now, on a morning in late February, she glided down the gangway of the *Greyhound*, which had just limped into port after an Antarctic relief expedition. The voyage had lasted for six months, and had been one of the mistakes of Cat's life, so far as her own pleasure was concerned.

The captain and crew of the *Greyhound* had been delighted when she sauntered aboard. The seal of success, they felt, had been set on the expedition. And they were right. The lost explorers had been discovered, living, though in desperate plight. Cat's reputation was still more enhanced.

But she herself was disgruntled, through and through. She had never, in all her years of travel, experienced such a voyage. She felt disillusioned; she felt ill. She felt like scratching the first hand that was stretched out to pat her.

"Hullo, Cat!" exclaimed a burly dock-hand. "So you're back from the Pole? And what captain are you going to sign up with next?" He bent to scratch her neck, but she eluded him and glided off with waving tail.

"Cat don't look very bright," observed another dock-hand.

"She's fed up, I expect, with the length of the last voyage," said the first speaker, staring after her. "She don't generally go for such long ones. *And* the weather! *And* the grub! She could have done much better for herself, and she knows it."

He turned to one of a crew which was about to sail for Norway.

"Hi, Bob! Here's Cat! Just back from the South Pole. P'raps you can make up to her."

Bob approached grinning. He planted himself in Cat's way, and held two thick tarry hands down to her.

"Puss, puss!" he wheedled. "Coom along wi' us. Tha can have whatever tha wants. Tha knows me, Cat."

She knew Bob well, and liked him. She suffered herself to be laid across his breast and she gave him a long look

out of her narrow green eyes. He felt her ribs with his blunt fingers.

"She's naught but fur and bone," he declared.

"Her's been frettin' fer home," said the first.

"The sea is her home," said Bob. "But she's a dainty feeder. S'll I carry thee off, Cat?"

She began softly to purr. She relaxed in every fibre. The tip of her tongue showed between her lips. She closed her eyes.

"She'll go with you," said the dock-hand, and Bob began to pick his way among the crates and bales, carrying Cat hopefully in his arms.

She heard the varied sounds of the docks, the shouts, the hoarse whistles of ships, the rattle of chains, smelled the familiar smells. It was music and sweetness to her after her long absence. She surrendered herself to the rhythmic movement of Bob's big chest.

In triumph he deposited her on his own deck. The rest of the crew stopped in their work for a moment to welcome her. The cook brought her a brace of sardines.

For politeness' sake she ate one; but left the other on the deck. She arched herself against the legs of the first mate and gave her three-cornered smile. A ray of feeble sunlight struggled through the wintry fog and fell across her. She began to think she might sail with this crew.

"Keep an eye on her," said the mate to a cabin-boy. "Don't let her out of your sight till we're away."

All about was hurry and noise. Cat sat on the deck washing the oil of the sardine from her whiskers. The pale sunshine surrounded her, but deep within her there was dissatisfaction growing. This was not what she wanted, and soon it would be too late to return to the docks. She would be in for another long, cold voyage.

Her little round black head looked very innocent. Her eyes were tight shut. Methodically she moved her curved paw over her face.

Someone called the boy, and forgetting the earlier order, he ran off. Cat was galvanized into life and movement

She flew along the deck. In another instant she would be on the docks. But Bob saw her, and caught her in his huge hands. She liked him; still she did not weaken. She thrust her claws into his hands, and with a yell of triumph and every hair erect, escaped.

It was some time before she regained her calm. She slunk among legs, among trucks, through scattered straw and trampled mud. The fog thickened again, settling clammy on her fur. It was bitterly cold. What she wanted was solitude. She was sick of the sight and sound of men and their doings.

She entered a warehouse and passed between tiers of wooden boxes and bales, stopping to sniff now and again when some smell attracted her. The cold in this building was very penetrating. Was she never to know warmth again?

In a dim shed she found stalls, all empty except one in which a prize ram was awaiting shipment to America, where he was to be used for breeding. She clambered up the partition of the stall and perched there, gazing down at him. She did not remember having seen anything like him before. His yellow gaze was as inscrutable as hers.

With paws tucked under her breast she sat enjoying the sight of him. She stared at his massive woolly shoulders, his curly horns, his restless pawing hoofs. He lowered his head and butted the manger in front of him with his hard skull. Cat felt that she could watch him for ever.

The gruff whistles of the ships shook the hoary air. The faint sunlight coming in at the cobwebbed window was shut off by a curtain of grey dusk. Cat and the ram were wrapped about by a strange intimacy. The chill increased. The docks became almost silent. The ram gave a bereft *baa* and sank to his knees.

Now he was only a pale mound in the dusk, but Cat still stared at him. He was conscious of her too; and like some earth-bound spirit, he raised his yellow gaze to the glimmering stars of her eyes.

Toward midnight the cold became unbearable to her. On the Antarctic expedition she had slept in the bunk

with a well-fleshed sailor. Now a thin rime was stiffening every hair of her coat. She rose stiffly and stretched. Her tail hung powerless. Some message, some understanding, passed between her and the ram.

She leaped from the partition and landed between his shoulders. She sank into the deep oily warmth of his wool. He remained motionless, silent as the hill where he had pastured.

She stretched herself out on him with a purr of delight. She sought to feel his flesh with the fine points of her claws through the depth of his wool. A smell new to her rose from his body, and the beginning of a *baa* stirred in his throat. Their two bodies united in the quiet breathing of sleep. Her sleep was light, of a pale luminous quality, always just on the edge of waking; but his was dark and heavy, as though he were surrounded by shaggy furze and thick heather.

A dense fog rose from the sea at dawn and pressed thickly into the stall. With it crept a long grey cat with a white blaze on his face, and his ears torn by fighting. He scrambled up the partition of the stall and peered down at the two below. He dropped to the manger, and from there to the straw. He touched Cat tentatively.

She had been conscious of his approach. It had brought into her dreams a vague vision of a tawny striped cat she had met in Rio de Janeiro, where the relief ship had called. But the touch of the paw galvanized her. She gave a shriek and driving her hind paws into the ram's back, she reared herself and struck at the intruder's face as though she would put her mark on it for ever.

But he was not easily frightened off. He sprang to the ram's back also, and through the fog Cat saw his white face grinning at her. He set his teeth in the back of her neck. They both shrieked.

The ram's deep, dark, warm slumber was shattered into fright. He bounded up, with a clatter of hoofs, overthrowing the cats. His white eyelashes flickered. He glared in primeval rage and lowered his head to charge.



The cats scrambled agilely over the partition and dropped to the stone floor outside, their tails enormous. They sped in opposite directions into dim corners of the shed. The battering of the ram's head against the door of the stall echoed through the fog.

As Cat reached her corner, a mouse flickered out of the gloom, squeaking in an agony of fear, and shot past her. With a graceful flourish of her limber body she turned completely round and captured the mouse with that one effective movement. She picked it up delicately in her teeth and crouched in the corner.

After a time the door opened and two men came in. They turned on a light, and the interior of the shed was revealed in foggy pallor. The men entered the stall where the ram was. There came strange bumping sounds. The men cursed. Then they appeared leading the ram, roped by the horns. He was led out helpless, his little hoofs pattering on the stone floor. He uttered a plaintive, lamb-like *baa*. The men left the door open behind them.

Cat discovered the body of the mouse. It now meant nothing to her. She glided out on to the docks, wondering what ship she would sail in. She passed among them as they were dimly revealed, cargoes being loaded or unloaded, men working like ants. She felt a dim wonder at their activity, a faint disdain for their heaving bodies.

Toward noon, when a shabby blurred disc showed where the sun was, she came upon a passenger-ship just departing on a West India cruise. She had never sailed on a passenger-ship. They were an untrustworthy and strange world, and she hated the sight of women.

As she stood pessimistically surveying it, a kitchen worker tossed a slice of chicken-breast through a porthole to her. She crouched on the pier devouring it, while shivers of delight made her separate hairs quiver. She had not known that such food existed. After it was gone, she sat beaming toward the porthole, but nothing more was thrown out.

Luggage was being loaded on to the ship, and a throng

of people of a sort she had never before seen hastened up the gangway. One of them, a man, bent and gently massaged the muscles in the back of her neck before he passed on. She beamed after him. She had not known such hands existed, so smooth, so tender. They were like the breast of chicken she had just devoured.

She rose, chilled by the clammy cold, and glided up the gangway on to the ship.

She knew that she was a stranger here, and some instinct told her that quite possibly she might not be welcome. She slunk along the innumerable white passages, making herself as nearly invisible as possible. She glanced in at the doors of staterooms, as she passed. Generally there were women inside, and sometimes the rather disgusting smell of flowers was in the air.

Cat heard the thunder of the whistle. She felt a quiver go through the ship. She had a mind to get off it while there was yet time, but she felt powerless to turn herself away from the delicious warmth that was radiated from every corner of the liner. It made her feel yielding, soft. She wanted something cosy to lie down on.

She paused at the door of a cabin that was empty except for the promise of a man's coat and hat thrown on the berth. She went in and walked round it, purring. She held her tail stiffly erect, all but the tip, which moved constantly as though it were, in some subtle way, gauging the spiritual atmosphere of the cabin.

Gregg, the swimming-instructor, found her there, curled up on his coat. They had left the docks, so she could not be put ashore. He recognized her as the cat he had caressed and supposed that she belonged on the liner. He tucked her under his arm and carried her to the kitchen quarters. The boy who had thrown her the morsel of chicken recognized her. He had once been galley-boy on an oil tanker she had favoured with her presence.

"It's Cat," he explained. "'Aven't yer never 'eard tell of Cat? W'y, we're in luck, mister! And yer ought to be proud to share your berth wiv 'er! "

But Gregg did not want to share his berth with Cat, even after he had heard her history and virtues. He dumped her down, and rather glumly retraced his steps. He felt a shrinking from the long cruise that stretched ahead of him. To be sociable was a part of his job, and he hated the thought of sociability.

He had, in fact, seen too much of people. He had had more experience of society than was good for him. He was not yet thirty, but he had lost a fair-sized fortune, the woman he loved, and worst of all, his hope and his fortitude. He had been at his wits' end to find a job, when a friend had got him this post as swimming-instructor. He was in a state bordering on despair, but here he was bound to seem cheerful and gay, to take a passionate interest in the flounderings of fat passengers in the pool.

No one on board was so out of sympathy with the cruise as was he. Indeed, everyone on board was in sympathy with the cruise but Gregg and Cat, who did not at all understand cruising for pleasure.

She was there in his berth waiting for him when he returned to his cabin that night, having found her way through all the intricacy of glittering passages. He was a little drunk, for he was very attractive, and people insisted on treating him. The sight of Cat lying there on his bed angered him. He was about to put her out roughly, when she rolled over on her back, turned up her black velvet belly and round little face with the glittering eyes narrowed and the three-cornered smile showing her pink tongue. He bent over her, pleased in spite of himself.

"You're a rogue," he said. "But you can't get around me like that."

For answer she clasped her forepaws round his neck and with her hind paws clawed gently on his shirt front. She pressed her face on his, and purred loudly in his ear.

"Cheek to cheek, eh?" said Gregg, and gave himself up to her hypnotic overtures.

Morning found them snuggled close together. He sent the steward for a dish of milk for her. He appeared at

the swimming-pool with her on his shoulder. She basked in the heavenly warmth of the place.

From that time she spent her days by the pool. Tolerantly, almost benignly, she watched the skill or awkwardness of the swimmers. When the pool was deserted, she crouched by its brink gazing at her reflection, dreaming of lovely fish that might have graced it. At night she slept with Gregg. She thrived immensely.

When they were in sparkling southern waters, Cat disappeared early one evening. She met Gregg at the door of his cabin with a tremulously excited air. She advanced toward him, purring, then turned her back and flaunted her sinuous black tail. She looked back at him over her shoulder. Her head and tail met. She caught the tip of it in her mouth and lay down on her back, rolling coily from side to side. She looked strangely slender.

"So you've been and gone and done it," said Gregg. "Not on the bed, I hope!"

No, not on the bed. In the wardrobe, where Gregg's soft dressing-gown had somehow fallen from the peg. There were three of them, all plump, all tawny, like the gentleman in Rio de Janeiro.

Next day Gregg got a nice box with a cushion and put the kittens in it. He carried them to the balmy warmth of the air that surrounded the swimming-pool, and all the bathers gathered to admire and stroke them. They were the pets of the ship. But Cat cared only for Gregg. She fussed over him far more than she did over her kittens. She refused to stay with them by the pool at night, so the box had to be carried to his cabin. There she would sit waiting for him, her glowing eyes fixed on the door, every nerve tuned for his coming.

But on one night he did not come. She waited and waited, but he did not come. At last she sprang up from suckling her kittens, and they fell back like three tawny balls. The door was fixed ajar. She glided through the opening and began her search for him.

The smoke-room was closed; the lounge was empty, the

decks deserted except for a pacing figure in uniform. At last Cat saw Gregg standing, still as a statue, in a secluded corner where a lifeboat hung. Silent as the shadows cast by the moonlight, she drew near to him. But she did not rub herself against his leg as usual. She climbed into the lifeboat, and over its edge, peered down into his face.

That night Gregg felt alone—lost. In spite of the moonlight, the myriad glittering waves, the world was black to him. The life on this luxurious liner, among these spoiled shallow people, was suffocating him; he could not breathe. He looked back on his own life as a waste, on his future with despair. He had made up his mind to end it all.

Cat watched him intently as he leaned against the rail. If he had been her prey, she could not have observed him with more meticulous concentration as he mounted it. Just before he would have leaped over the side, she sprang on to his shoulders with a shriek that curdled the blood of those whose staterooms gave on that deck. She not only shrieked, but she drove every claw into Gregg. She turned herself into a black fury whose every hair stood on end, whose eyes glared with hate and fear at that gulf below...

"I don't know what the devil is the matter with her," Gregg said to the officer who hastened up. "She's as temperamental as a prima donna." His hand shook as he stroked her.

But she had saved him from his black mood, saved him from his despairing self. When he was undressed he looked with wonder at the little bloody spots on his shoulders... Cat slept on his chest.

He made up his mind that he would never part with her. He owed her a debt which could only be repaid by the certainty of affection and gentle living for the rest of her days. He would find lodgings where she would be welcome.

But Gregg reckoned without Cat. By the time they reached port she was sick to death of the luxury liner. There was not a smell on board that pleased her. She liked Gregg, but she could do without him. She liked her

three plump kittens, but the quality of real mother love did not exist in her. She loved the sea and the men who spent their days in strenuous work on the sea. She disliked women and scent and all daintiness. She was Cat; she could not change herself.

In the confusion of landing no one saw her slip ashore. She vanished like a puff of black smoke. It was as lovely a morning as any they had seen on the cruise. The air was balmy, the sky above the docks blue as a periwinkle. When Cat reached the places she was accustomed to, she purred loudly and rubbed herself against tarry trouser-legs, arched her neck to horny hands. But she was coy. She would not commit herself. For a fortnight she lived on the dock, absorbing the satisfying smells of fresh timber, straw, tar, salt fish, hemp, beer, oil and sweat. She even renewed acquaintance, this time more amiably though with loud screams, with the grey-furred gentleman who had called on her in the ram's stall.

At last she sailed on a cattle-ship, and all her past was as nothing to her!

## “If she had the Family—”

IBBY HALL

SHE WAS THE BEST mouser in the Animal House of a renowned university, and the other cats had to make the best of it. They slouched past her, shifting their green eyes insensitively and hunching their shoulders and knowing no way to humble her. “If she had the family I have—” they were fond of grumbling to each other without finishing the sentence. Or, “she has a bloodthirsty nature,” they would declare virtuously among themselves. “Personally, I’d rather have a little love and affection than kill a thousand mice. And what *time* have you for killing mice—” they would ask.

It was true; the Empress had little time for love or affection. Admiration she accepted as carelessly as breath. But where a lesser cat would rear its haunches and close its eyes, leaning against the casual affection of a human hand, the Empress slightly withdrew herself and sniffed. She saved the slow pound of emotion for the chase, for fearful scurrying mice; but above all for rats. It was as a smeller-out and destroyer of rats that she knew her fiercest joy.

As the air currents of the building circled and shifted about her head she would fix her luminous yellow eyes on space, and listen. The tip of her sensitive nose would tremble suddenly; she would rise softly to her padded feet. She would move lazily toward a doorway—in her heart a strange wind rising, coiling like a tornado, compressed and curbed. Her eyes blown into two flames, her muscles tightened into steel, on a lightning flash of precision—on a sudden surge of lust and exultancy—she would spring to kill.

She never condescended to the ways of playful cats. She hunted for savagery, not for amusement; and the rat was doomed from the beginning.

When her kittens arrived she was astounded. She arched her tigerish head above them and bending, washed them violently. She rose, so recently exhausted, to her feet and walked around the strange little creatures, sniffing. Finally she threw herself upon her side, watching them as they mewed and struggled closer and closer, pressing against her body for food. It was new and it was outrageous. That she should be called upon for this! She began doubtfully to wash them again, struggling with her own sensations. She would do nothing hastily, she decided. She would give up only gradually to this delicious and luxurious emotion—And so she was no more than beginning to give up when the kittens died, victims of the experimenting gods.

The Empress who had inflicted death magnificently upon her hundreds was stunned— What had happened? She had seen nothing. No beast had been near them. Only the small creatures at her surrendering breasts had gradually become still, had turned cold. She struggled to warm them, covering them with her body, beginning to give up to fear.

One of the gods came finally and lifted them into his hands. She followed him trustfully down the corridor—as far as the door that closed in front of her. Here she waited, standing anxiously at first, then sitting patiently upon her haunches. When he came out long afterward, she trotted hopefully at his heels to the great front door of the building. But it banged after him. Now she was alone.

She lifted her head and gazed at the silent door. Then her voice made a strange sound. She listened. She had never heard that sound from her own throat before. There was a dreadful comfort in it. It sounded as though there would surely be an answer somewhere. But the door stayed silent. So she turned slowly back along the corridor.

On her dazed progress up the corridor she passed two other cats and stopped and looked at them attentively. She opened her mouth, but it made no sound, only opened and closed while her yellow eyes asked a question of their green ones. But they only stared in uncomfortable disdain at the wall above her head.



Further on, as she made the turn behind the cellar stairs, she stopped suddenly and listened. Her nose twitched. Her eyes became intelligent and fixed. The air stirring faintly about her head was unmistakable. She moved forward softly, intently—she sprang like a golden arrow; and landed on her cushioned feet beside a nest of baby rats.

There was a dreadful agony in her breast that tore at her throat and paralysed her jaws while she stood stiffly and stared at the rats. She managed to open her mouth slightly, only slightly, and the strange sound came out. She listened after the cry that must be answered, that was never answered. And feebly a baby rat lifted its head and squeaked.

At last she threw herself upon her side again, curving her paws around the little struggling creatures, and with her eyes half closed began to wash her babies.

## Broomsticks

WALTER DE LA MARE

MISS CHAUNCEY'S CAT, Sam, had been with her many years before she noticed anything unusual, anything *disturbing*, in his conduct. Like most cats who live under the same roof with but one or two humans, he had always been more sagacious than cats of a common household. He had learned Miss Chauncey's ways. He acted, that is, as nearly like a small mortal dressed up in a hairy coat as one could expect a cat to act. He was what is called an "intelligent" cat.

But though Sam had learned much from Miss Chauncey, I am bound to say that Miss Chauncey had learned very little from Sam. She was a kind, indulgent mistress; she could sew, and cook, and crochet, and make a bed, and read and write and cipher a little. And when she was a girl she used to sing "Kathleen Mavourneen" to the piano. Sam, of course, could do nothing of this kind.

But then, Miss Chauncey could no more have caught and killed a mouse or a blackbird with her five naked fingers than she could have been Pope of Rome. Nor could she run up a six-foot brick wall, or leap clean from the hearthmat in her parlour on to the shelf of her chimney-piece without disturbing a single ornament, or even tinkle one crystal glass-drop against another. Unlike Sam, she could not find her way in the dark, or by her sense of smell; or keep in good health by merely nibbling grass in the garden. If, moreover, as a little girl she had been held up by her feet and hands two or three feet above the ground and then dropped, she would have at once fallen plump on her back, whereas when Sam was only a three-months-old he could have managed to twist clean about in the air in twelve inches and come down on his four feet as firm as a table.

While Sam, then, learned a good deal from Miss Chauncey, she had learned nothing from him. And even if she had been willing to be taught, it is doubtful if she would ever have proved even a promising pupil. What is more, she knew much less about Sam than he knew about his mistress—until, at least, that afternoon when she was doing her hair in the glass. And then she could hardly believe her own eyes. It was a moment that completely changed her views about Sam—and nothing after that experience was ever quite the same again.

Sam had always been a fine upstanding creature, his fur jet-black and silky, his eyes a lambent green, even in sunshine, and at night a-glow like green topazes. He was now full seven years of age, and had an unusually powerful miaou. Living as he did quite alone with Miss Chauncey at Post Houses, it was natural that he should become her constant companion. For Post Houses was a singularly solitary house, standing almost in the middle of Haggurdsdon Moor, just where two wandering byways cross each other like the half-closed blades of a pair of shears or scissors.

It was a mile and a half from its nearest neighbour, Mr. Cullings, the carrier; and yet another quarter of a mile from the village of Haggurdsdon. Its roads were extremely ancient. They had been sheep-tracks long before the Romans came to England and had cut *their* roads from shore to shore. But for many years past few travellers or carts or even sheep with their shepherd came Miss Chauncey's way. You could have gazed from her windows for hours together, even on a summer's day, without seeing so much as a tinker's barrow or a gipsy's van.

Post Houses, too, was perhaps the ugliest house there ever was. Its four corners stood straight up on the moor like a house of nursery bricks. From its flat roof on a clear day the eye could see for miles and miles across the moor, Mr. Cullings's cottage being out of sight in a shallow hollow. It had belonged to Miss Chauncey's ancestors for numbers of generations. Many people in Haggurdsdon indeed called

it Chauncey's. And though in a great wind it was almost as full of noises as an organ, though it was a cold barn in winter, and though another branch of the family had as far back as the 'seventies gone to live in the Isle of Wight, Miss Chauncey still remained faithful to its four walls. In fact she loved the ugly old place, for she had lived in it ever since she was a little girl with knickerbockers showing under her skirts and pale-blue ribbon shoulder knots.

This fact alone made Sam's conduct the more reprehensible, for never cat had kinder mistress. Miss Chauncey herself was now about sixty years of age—fifty-three years older than Sam. She was five foot ten-and-a-half inches in height. On week-days she wore black alpaca, and on Sundays a watered silk. Her large round steel spectacles straddling across her high nose gave her a look of being keen as well as cold. But truly she was neither. For even so stupid a man as Mr. Cullings could take her in over the cartage charge of a parcel—just by looking tired or sighing as he glanced at his rough-haired, knock-kneed mare. And there was the warmest of hearts under her stiff bodice.

Being so far from the village, milk and cream were a little difficult, of course. But Miss Chauncey could deny Sam nothing—in reason. She paid a whole sixpence a week to a little girl called Susan Ard who brought these dainties from the nearest farm. They were dainties indeed, for though the grasses on Haggurdsdon Moor were of dark sour green, the cows that grazed on it gave an uncommonly rich milk, and Sam flourished on it. Mr. Cullings called once a week on his round, and had a standing order to bring with him a few sprats or fresh herrings, or any other toothsome fish that was in season. Miss Chauncey would not even withhold her purse from expensive whitebait, if no other cheaper fish were procurable. And Mr. Cullings would eye Sam fawning about his cartwheel, or gloating up at his dish, and say, "'Ee be a queer animal, shure enough; 'ee be a wunnerful queer animal, 'ee be."

As for Miss Chauncey herself, she was a niggardly eater, though much attached to her tea. She made her own bread and cookies. On Saturday a butcher-boy drove up in a striped apron. Besides which she was a wonderful manager. Her cupboards were full of homemade jams and bottled fruits and dried herbs—everything of that kind, for Post Houses had a nice long strip of garden behind it, surrounded by a high old yellow brick wall.

Quite early in life Sam, of course, had learned to know his meal-time—though how he “told” it was known only to himself, for he never appeared even to glance at the face of the grandfather’s clock on the staircase. He was punctual, particularly in his toilet, and a prodigious sleeper. He had learned to pull down the latch of the back door, if, in the months when an open window was not to be found, he wished to go out. Indeed at last he preferred the latch. He never slept on Miss Chauncey’s patchwork quilt, unless his own had been placed over it. He was particular almost to a foppish degree in his habits, and he was no thief. He had a mew on one note to show when he wanted something to eat; a mew a semitone or two higher if he wanted drink (that is, cold water, for which he had a great taste); and yet another mew—gentle and sustained—when he wished, so to speak, to converse with his mistress.

Not, of course, that the creature talked *English*, but he liked to sit upon one chair by the fireside, especially in the kitchen—for he was no born parlour-cat—and to look up at the glinting glasses of Miss Chauncey’s spectacles, and then down awhile at the fire-flames (drawing his claws in and out as he did so, and purring the while), almost as if he might be preaching a sermon or reciting a poem.

But this was in the happy days when all seemed well. This was in the days when Miss Chauncey’s mind was innocent of all doubts and suspicions. Like others of his kind, too, Sam delighted to lie in the window and idly watch the birds in the apple-trees—tits and bullfinches and dunnocks—or to crouch over a mouse-hole for hours

together. Such were his amusements (for he never ate his mice) while Miss Chauncey, with cap and broom, duster and dishclout, went about her housework. But he also had a way of examining things in which cats are not generally interested. He as good as told Miss Chauncey one afternoon that a hole was coming in her parlour carpet. For he walked to and fro and back and forth with his tail up, until she attended to him. And he certainly warned her, with a yelp like an Amazonian monkey, when a red-hot coal had set her kitchen mat on fire.

He would lie or sit with his whiskers to the North before noonday, and due South afterwards. In general his manners were perfection. But occasionally when she called him, his face would appear to knot itself into a frown—at any rate to assume a low sullen look, as if he expostulated, "Why must you be interrupting me, Madam, when I am thinking of something else?" And now and then Miss Chauncey fancied he would deliberately secrete himself and steal out and in of Post Houses unbeknown.

Miss Chauncey, too, would sometimes find him trotting from room to room as if on a visit of inspection. On his fifth birthday he had brought an immense mouse and laid it beside the patent toe-cap of her boot, as she sat knitting by the fire. She smiled and nodded merrily at him, as usual, but on this occasion he had looked at her intently, and then deliberately shook his head. After that, he never paid the smallest attention to mouse or mouse-hole or mousery, and Miss Chauncey was obliged to purchase a cheese-bait trap, else she would have been overrun.

Almost any domestic cat may do things of this nature, and of course all this was solely on Sam's domestic side. For he shared house with Miss Chauncey and, like any two beings that live together, he was bound to keep up certain appearances. He met her halfway, as the saying goes. When, however, he was "on his own," he was no longer Miss Chauncey's Sam, he was no longer merely the cat at Post Houses, but just *himself*. He went back, that is, to his own free independent life; to his own private habits.

Then the moor on which he roved was his own country, and the humans and their houses on it were no more to him in his wild, privy existence than molehills or badgers' earths, or rabbits' mounds are to us. Of this side of his life his mistress knew practically nothing. She did not consider it. She supposed that Sam behaved like other cats, though it was evident that at times he went far abroad, for he now and then brought home a Cochin China chick, and the nearest Cochin China fowls were at the vicarage, a good four miles off. Sometimes of an evening, too, when Miss Chauncey was taking a little walk herself, she would see him—a swiftly-moving black speck—far along the road, hastening home. And there was more purpose expressed in his gait and appearance than ever Mr. Cullings showed!

It was pleasant to observe, too, when he came within miaouing distance how his manner changed. He turned at once from being a Cat into being a Domestic Cat. He was instantaneously no longer the Feline Adventurer, the Nocturnal Marauder and Haunter of Haggurdsdon Moor (though Miss Chauncey would not have so expressed it), but simply his mistress's spoiled pet, Sam. She loved him dearly. But, as again with human beings who are accustomed to live together, she did not *think* very much about him. It could not but be a shock then that latish afternoon, when without the slightest warning Miss Chauncey discovered that Sam was deliberately deceiving her!

She was brushing her thin brown front hair before her looking-glass. And this moment it hung down over her face like a fine loose veil. And as she always mused of other things when she was brushing her hair, she was somewhat absentminded the while. Then suddenly, on raising her eyes behind this mesh of hair, she perceived not only Sam's reflection was in sight of the looking-glass, but that something a little mysterious was happening. Sam was sitting up as if to beg. There was nothing in that. It had been a customary feat of his since he was six months old. Still, for what might he be begging, no one by?

Now the window to the right of the chintz-valanced

dressings-table was open at the top. Without, it was beginning to grow dark. All Haggurdsdon Moor lay hushed and still in the evening's coming gloom. And apart from begging when there was nothing to beg for, Sam seemed, so to speak, to be gesticulating with his paws. He appeared, that is, to be making signs, just as if there were someone or something looking in at the window at him from out of the air—which was quite impossible. And there was a look upon his face that certainly Miss Chauncey had never seen before.

She stayed a moment with hair-brush uplifted, her long lean arm at an angle with her head. On seeing this, Sam had instantly desisted from these motions. He had dropped to his fours again, and was now apparently composing himself for another nap. No; this too was a pretence, for presently, as she watched, he turned restlessly about so that his whiskers were once again due South. His backward part toward the window, he was now gazing straight in front of him out of a far from friendly face. Far indeed from friendly for a creature that has lived with you ever since he opened the eyes of his first kittenhood.

As if he had read her thoughts, Sam at that moment lifted his head to look at his mistress; she withdrew her eyes to the glass only in the nick of time and when she turned from her toilet there sat he—so serene in appearance, so puss-like, so ordinary once more that Miss Chauncey could scarcely believe anything whatever had been amiss. Had her eyes deluded her—her glass? Was that peculiar motion of Sam's fore-paws (almost as if he were knitting), was that wide excited stare only due to the fact that he was catching what was, to her, an invisible fly?

Miss Chauncey having now neatly arranged her "window-curtains"—the sleek loops of hair she wore on either side her high forehead—glanced yet again at the window. Nothing there but the silence of the moor; nothing there but the faint pricking of a star as the evening darkened.

Sam's cream was waiting on the hearthrug in the parlour



as usual at five o'clock. The lamp was lit. The red blinds were drawn. The fire crackled in the grate. There they sat, these two; the walls of the four-cornered house beside the cross-roads rising up above them like a huge oblong box under the immense starry sky that saucered in the wide darkness of the moor.

And while she so sat—with Sam there, seemingly fast asleep—Miss Chauncey was thinking. What had occurred in the bedroom that early evening had reminded her of other odd little bygone happenings. Trifles she had scarcely noticed but which now returned clearly to memory. How often in the past, for example, Sam at this hour would be sitting as if fast asleep (as now), his paws tucked neatly in, looking much like a stout alderman after a high dinner. And then suddenly, without warning, as if a distant voice had called him, he would leap to his feet and run straight out of the room. And somewhere in the house—door ajar or window agape—he would find his egress and be up and away into the night. This had been a common thing to happen.

Once, too, Miss Chauncey had found him squatting on his hindquarters on the window-ledge of a little room that had been entirely disused since her fair little Cousin Milly had stayed at Post Houses when Miss Chauncey was a child of eight. She had cried out at sight of him, "You foolish Sam, you! Come in, sir. You will be tumbling out of the window next!" And she remembered as if it were yesterday that though at this he had stepped gingerly in at once from his dizzy perch, he had not looked at her. He had passed her without a sign.

On moonlight evenings, too—why, you could never be sure where he was. You could never be sure from what errand he had *returned*. Was she sure indeed where he was on *any* night? The longer she reflected, the deeper grew her doubts and misgivings. This night, at any rate, Miss Chauncey determined to keep watch. But she was not happy in doing so. She hated all manner of spying. They were old companions, Sam and she; and she, with-

out him, in bleak Post Houses, would be sadly desolate. She loved Sam dearly. None the less, the spectacle of that afternoon haunted her, and it would be wiser to know all that there was to be known, even if for Sam's sake only.

Now Miss Chauncey always slept with her bedroom door ajar. She had slept so ever since her nursery days. Being a rather timid little girl, she liked in those far-away times to hear the grown-up voices downstairs and the spoons and forks clinking. As for Sam, he always slept in his basket beside her fireplace. Every morning there he would be, though on some mornings Miss Chauncey's eyes would open gently to find herself gazing steadily into his pale-green ones as he stood on his hind-paws, resting his front ones on her bed-side, and looking into her face. "Time for your milk, Sam?" his mistress would murmur. And Sam would mew, as distantly almost as a seagull in the height of the sky.

To-night, however, Miss Chauncey only pretended to fall asleep. It was difficult, however, to keep wholly awake, and she was all but drowsing off when there came a faint squeak from the hinge of her door, and she realized that Sam was gone out. After waiting a moment or two, she struck a match. Yes, there was his empty basket in the dark, silent room, and presently from far away—from the steeple at Haggurdsdon Village—came the knolling of midnight.

Miss Chauncey placed the dead end of the match in the saucer of her candlestick, and at that moment fancied she heard a faint *whssh* at her window, as of a sudden gust or scurry of wind, or the wings of a fast-flying bird—of a wild goose. It even reminded Miss Chauncey of half-forgotten Guy Fawkes Days and of the sound the stick of a rocket makes as it sweeps down through the air while its green and ruby lights die out in the immense heavens above. Miss Chauncey gathered up her long legs in the bed, drew on the flannel dressing-gown that always hung on her bed-rail, and lifting back the blind an inch or two, looked out of the window.

It was a high starry night, and a brightening in the sky above the roof seemed to betoken there must be a moon over the backward parts of the house. Even as she watched, a streak of pale silver descended swiftly out of the far spaces of the heavens where a few larger stars were gathered as if in the shape of a sickle. It was a meteorite; and at that very instant Miss Chauncey fancied she heard a faint remote dwindling *whssh* in the air. Was *that* a meteor too? Could she have been deceived? Was she being deceived in everything? She drew back.

And then, as if in deliberate and defiant answer, out of the distance, from what appeared to be the extreme end of her long garden, where grew a tangle of sloe bushes, there followed a prolonged and as if half-secret caterwaul; very low—contralto, one might say—*Meearou-rou-rou-rou*.

Heaven forbid! Was *that* Sam's tongue? The caterwauling ceased. Yet still Miss Chauncey could not suppress a shudder. She knew Sam's voice of old. But surely not that! Surely not that!

Strange and immodest, too, though it was to hear herself in that solitary place calling out in the dead of night, she none the less at once opened the window and summoned Sam by name. There was no response. The trees and bushes of the garden stood motionless; their faint shadows on the ground revealing how small a moon was actually in the sky, and how low it hung towards its setting. The vague undulations of the moor stretched into the distance. Not a light to be seen except those of the firmament. Again, and yet again, Miss Chauncey cried, "Sam, Sam! Come away in! Come away in, sir, you bad creature!" Not a sound. Not the least stir of leaf or blade of grass.

When, after so broken a night, Miss Chauncey awoke a little late the next morning, the first thing her eyes beheld when she sat up in bed was Sam—couched as usual in his basket. It was a mystery, and an uneasy one. After supping up his morning bowl, he slept steadily on until noon-day. This happened to be the day of the week when Miss

Chauncey made bread. On and on she steadily kneaded the dough with her knuckled hands, glancing ever and again towards the motionless creature. With fingers clotted from the great earthenware bowl, she stood over him at last for a few moments, and looked at him closely.

He was lying curled round with his whiskered face to one side towards the fire. And it seemed to Miss Chauncey that she had never noticed before that faint peculiar grin on his face. "Sam!" she cried sharply. An eye instantly opened, fiercely green as if a mouse had squeaked. He stared at her for an instant; then the lid narrowed. The gaze slunk away a little, but Sam began to purr.

The truth of it is, all this was making Miss Chauncey exceedingly unhappy. Mr. Cullings called that afternoon with a basket of some fine comely young sprats. "Them'll wake his Royal Highness up," he said. "They'm fresh as daisies. Lor, m'm, what a Nero that beast be!"

"Cats *are* strange creatures, Mr. Cullings," replied Miss Chauncey reflectively, complacently, supposing that Mr. Cullings had misplaced an *h* and had meant to say *an hero*. And Sam himself, with uplifted tail, and as if of the same opinion, was rubbing his head gently against her boot.

Mr. Cullings eyed her closely. "Why, yes, they be," he said. "What I says is, is that as soon as they're out of your sight, you are out of their mind. There's no more gratitood nor affection in a cat than in a pump. Though so far as the pump is concerned, the gratitood should be on our side. I knew a Family of Cats once what fairly druv their mistress out of house and home."

"But you wouldn't have a cat *only* a pet?" said Miss Chauncey faintly; afraid to ask for further particulars of the peculiar occurrence.

"Why no, m'm," said the carrier. "As the Lord made 'em, so they be. But I'll be bound they could tell some knotty stories if they had a human tongue in their heads!"

Sam had ceased caressing his mistress's foot, and was looking steadily at Mr. Cullings, his hair roughed a little

about the neck and shoulders. And the carrier looked back.

"No, m'm. We wouldn't keep 'em," he said at last, "if they was *four* times that size. Or, not for long!"

Having watched Mr. Cullings's little cart bowl away into the distance, Miss Chauncey returned into the house, more disturbed than ever. Nor did her uneasiness abate when Sam refused even to sniff at his sprats. Instead, he crawled under a low table in the kitchen, behind the old seaman's chest in which Miss Chauncey kept her kindling-wood. She fancied she heard his claws working in the wood now and again; once he seemed to be expressing his natural feelings in what vulgar people with little sympathy for animals describe as "swearing."

Her caressing "Sams," at any rate, were all in vain. His only reply was a kind of sneeze which uncomfortably resembled "spitting." Miss Chauncey's feelings had already been hurt. It was now her mind that suffered. Something the carrier had said, or the way he had said it, or the peculiar look she had noticed on his face when he was returning Sam's stare in the porch, haunted her thoughts. She was no longer young; was she becoming fanciful? Or must she indeed conclude that for weeks past Sam had been steadily deceiving her, or at any rate concealing his wanderings and his interests? What nonsense! Worse still:—Was she now so credulous as to believe that Sam had in actual fact been making signals—and secretly, behind her back—to some confederate that must either have been up in the sky, or in the moon!

Whether or not, Miss Chauncey determined to keep a sharper eye on him, if for his own sake only. She would at least make sure that he did not leave the house that night. But then: why not? she asked herself. Why shouldn't the creature choose his own hour and season? Cats, like owls, *see* best in the dark. They go best a-mousing in the dark, and may prefer the dark for their private, social, and even public affairs. Post Houses, after all, was only rather more than two miles from Haggurdsdon Village,

and there were cats there in plenty. Poor fellow, her own dumb human company must sometimes be dull enough!

Such were Miss Chauncey's reflections; and, as if to reassure her, Sam himself at that moment serenely entered the room and leapt up on to the empty chair beside her tea-table. As if, too, to prove that he had thought better of his evil temper, or to insinuate that there had been nothing amiss between himself and Mr. Cullings, he was licking his chops, and there was no mistaking the odour of fish which he brought in with him from his saucer.

"So you have thought better of it, my boy?" thought Miss Chauncey, though she did not utter the words aloud. And yet as she returned his steady feline gaze, she realized how difficult it was to read the intelligence behind those eyes. You might say that, Sam being only a cat, there was no meaning in them at all. But Miss Chauncey knew she couldn't have said it if such eyes had looked out of a *human* shape at her! She would have been acutely alarmed.

Unfortunately, and almost as if Sam had overheard his mistress's speculations regarding possible cat friends in the Village, there came at that moment a faint wambling mew beneath the open window. In a flash Sam was out of his chair and over the window ledge, and Miss Chauncey rose only just in time to see him in infuriated pursuit of a slim sleek tortoise-shell creature that had evidently come to Post Houses in hope of a friendlier reception, and was now fleeing in positive fear of its life.

Sam returned from his chase as fresh as paint, and Miss Chauncey was horrified to detect—caught up between the claws of his right foot—a tuft or two of tortoise-shell fur, which, having composed himself by the fire, he promptly removed by licking.

Still pondering on these disquieting events, Miss Chauncey took her usual evening walk in the garden. Candytuft and Virginia stock were blossoming along the shell-lined path, and roses were already beginning to blow on the high brick wall which shut off her narrow strip of land from the vast lap of the moor. Having come to the end

of the path, Miss Chauncey pushed on a little farther than usual, to where the grasses grew more rampant, and where wild headlong weeds raised their heads beneath her few lichenous apple trees. Still farther down—for hers was a long, though narrow, garden—there grew straggling bushes of sloe, spiny white-thorn. These had blossomed there indeed in the moor's bleak springs long before Post Houses had raised its chimney-tops into the sky. Here, too, flourished a dense drift of dead-nettles—their sour odour haunting the air.

And it was in this forlorn spot that—like Robinson Crusoe before her—Miss Chauncey was suddenly brought to a standstill by the sight of what appeared to be nothing else than a strange footprint in the mould. Nearby the footprint, moreover, showed what might be the impression of a walking-cane, or possibly of something stouter and heavier—a crutch. Could she again be deceived? The footprint, it was true, was unlike most human footprints, the heel sunk low, the toe square. Might it be accidental? *Was it a footprint?*

Miss Chauncey glanced up across the bushes towards the house. It loomed gaunt and forbidding in the moorland dusk. And she fancied she could see, though the evening light might be deceiving her, the cowering shape of Sam looking out at her from the kitchen window. To be watched! To be herself spied upon—and watched!

But then, of course, Sam was always watching her. What oddity was there in that? Where else would his sprats come from, his cream, his saucer of milk, his bowl of fresh well-water? Nevertheless Miss Chauncey returned to her parlour gravely discomposed.

It was an uncommonly still evening, and as she went from room to room locking the windows, she noticed there was already a moon in the sky. She eyed it with misgiving. And at last bed-time came, and when Sam, as usual, after a lick or two, had composed himself in his basket, Miss Chauncey, holding the key almost challengingly within view, deliberately locked her bedroom door.

When she awoke next morning Sam was sleeping in his basket as usual, and during the day-time he kept pretty closely to the house. So, too, on the Wednesday and the Thursday. It was not until the following Friday that having occasion to go into an upper bedroom that had no fireplace, and being followed as usual by Sam, Miss Chauncey detected the faint rank smell of soot in the room. No chimney, and a smell of soot! She turned rapidly on her companion; he had already left the room.

And when that afternoon she discovered a black sooty smear upon her own patchwork quilt, she realized not only that her suspicions had been justified, but that for the first time in his life Sam had deliberately laid himself down there in her absence. At this act of sheer defiance, she was no longer so much hurt as exceedingly angry. There was no doubt now. Sam was deliberately defying her. No two companions could share a house on such terms as these. He must be taught a lesson.

That evening, in full sight of the creature, having locked her bedroom door, she stuffed a large piece of mattress ticking into the mouth of her chimney and pulled down the register. Having watched these proceedings, Sam rose from his basket, and with an easy spring, leapt up on to the dressing-table. Beyond the window, the moor lay almost as bright as day. Ignoring Miss Chauncey, the creature squatted there steadily and openly staring into the empty skies, for a whole stretch of them was visible from where he sat.

Miss Chauncey proceeded to make her toilet for the night, trying in vain to pretend that she was entirely uninterested in what the animal was at. Faint sounds—not exactly mewings or growlings, but a kind of low inward caterwauling, hardly audible—were proceeding from his throat. But whatever these sounds might mean, Sam himself can have been the only listener. There was not a sign or movement at the window or in the world without. And then Miss Chauncey promptly drew down the blind. At this Sam at once raised his paw for all the world as if he



were about to protest, and then, apparently thinking better of it, he pretended instead that the action had been only for the purpose of commencing his nightly wash.

Long after her candle had been extinguished, Miss Chauncey lay listening. Every stir and movement in the quiet darkness could be clearly followed. First there came a furtive footing and tapping at the register of the fire-place, so closely showing what was happening that Miss Chauncey could positively see in her imagination Sam on the hearth-stone, erecting himself there upon his hind-legs, vainly attempting to push the obstacle back.

This being in vain, he appeared to have dropped back on to his fours. Then came a pause. Had he given up his intention? No; now he was at the door, pawing, gently scratching. Then a leap, even towards the handle; but one only—the door was locked. Retiring from the door, he now sprang lightly again on to the dressing-table. What now was he at? By covertly raising her head a little from her pillow, Miss Chauncey could see him with paw thrust out, gently drawing back the blind from the moon-flooded window-pane. And even while she listened and watched, she heard yet again—and yet again—the faint *whssh* as of a wild swan cleaving the air; and then what might have been the cry of a bird, but which to Miss Chauncey's ears resembled a shrill cackle of laughter. At this Sam hastily turned from the window and without the least attempt at concealment pounced clean from the dressing-table on to the lower rail of her bed.

This unmannerly conduct could be ignored no longer. Poor Miss Chauncey raised herself in her sheets, pulled her night-cap a little closer down over her ears, and thrusting out her hand towards the chair beside the bed, struck a match and relit her candle. It was with a real effort that she then slowly turned her head and faced her night-companion. His hair was bristling about his body as if he had had an electric shock. His whiskers stood out at stiff angles with his jaws. He looked at least twice his usual size, and his eyes blazed in his head, as averting his

face from her regard he gave vent to a low sustained *Miaridou-rou-rou!*

"I say you shall *not*," cried Miss Chauncey at the creature. At the sound of her words, he turned slowly and confronted her. And it seemed that until that moment Miss Chauncey had never actually seen Sam's countenance as in actual fact it really was. It was not so much the grinning tigerish look it wore, but the sullen assurance upon it of what he wanted and that he meant to get it.

All thought of sleep was now out of the question. Miss Chauncey could be obstinate too. The creature seemed to shed an influence on the very air which she could hardly resist. She rose from her bed and thrusting on her slippers made her way to the window. Once more a peculiar inward cry broke out from the bed-rail. She raised the blind and the light of the moon from over the moor swept in upon her little apartment. And when she turned to remonstrate with her pet at his ingratitude, and at all this unseemliness and the deceit of his ways, there was something so menacing and pitiless in his aspect that Miss Chauncey hesitated no more.

"Well, mark me!" she cried in a trembling voice, "go out of the *door* you shan't. But if you enjoy soot, soot it shall be."

With that she thrust back the register with the poker, and drew down the bundle of ticking with the tongs. And before the fit of coughing caused by the consequent smotheration that followed had ceased, the lithe black shape had sprung from the bed-rail, and with a scramble was into the hearth, over the fire-bars, up the chimney, and away.

Trembling from head to foot, Miss Chauncey sat down on a cane rocking-chair that stood nearby to reflect what next she must be doing. *Wh-ssh! Wh-ssh!* Again at the window came that mysterious rushing sound, but now the flurrying murmur as of a rocket shooting up with its fiery train of sparks thinning into space, rather than the sound of its descending stick. And then in the hush that followed

there sounded yet again, like a voice from the foot of the garden—a caterwauling piercing and sonorous enough to arouse the sleeping cocks in the Haggurdsdon hen-roosts and for miles around. Out of the distance their chanticleering broke shrill on the night air; to be followed a moment afterwards by the tardy clang of midnight from the church steeple. Then once more silence; utter quiet. Miss Chauncey returned to her bed, but that night she slept no more.

Her mind overflowed with unhappy thoughts. Her faith in Sam was gone. Far worse, she had lost faith even in her affection for him. To have wasted that!—all the sprats, all the whitebait in the wide seas were as nothing by comparison. That Sam had wearied of her company was at least beyond question. It shamed her to think how much this meant to her—a mere animal! But she knew what was gone; knew how dull and spiritless in future the day's round would seem—the rising, the housework, the meals, a clean linen collar—the long, slow afternoon, forsaken and companionless! The solitary tea, her candle, prayers, bed—on and on. In what wild company was her cat Sam now? At her own refusal to face this horrid question it was as if she had heard the hollow clanging slam of an immense iron door.

Next morning—still ruminating on these strange events, grieved to the heart at this dreadful rift between herself and one who had been her honest companion of so many years; ashamed, too, that Sam should have had his way with her when she had determined not to allow him to go out during the night—the next morning Miss Chauncey, as if merely to take a little exercise, once again ventured down to the foot of her garden. A faint, blurred mark (such as she had seen on the previous evening) in the black mould of what *might* be a footprint is nothing very much.

But now—in the neglected patch beyond the bushes of white-thorn and bramble—there was no doubt in the world appeared the marks of many. And surely no cats' paw-prints these! Of what use, too, to a cat could a crutch or a staff be? A staff or crutch which—to judge from the

impression it had left in the mould—must have been at least as thick as a broomstick.

More disquieted and alarmed than ever over this fresh mystery, Miss Chauncey glanced up and back towards the chimney-pots of the house, clearly and sharply fretted against the morning light of the eastern skies. And she realized what perils even so sure-footed a creature as Sam had faced when he skirred up out of the chimney in his wild effort to emerge into the night. Having thus astonishingly reached the rim of the chimney-pot—the burning stars above and the wilderness of the moor spread out far beneath and around him—he must have leaped from the top of the pot to a narrow brick ledge not three inches wide. Thence on to the peak of the roof and thence down a steep slippery slope of slates to a leaden gutter.

And how then? The thick tod of ivy matting the walls of the house reached hardly more than half-way up. Could Sam actually have plunged from gutter to tod? The very thought of such peril drew Miss Chauncey's steps towards the house again, in the sharpest anxiety to assure herself that he was still in the land of the living.

And lo and behold, when she was but half-way on her journey, she heard a succession of frenzied cries and cat-calls in the air from over the moor. Hastily placing a flower-pot by the wall, she stood on tiptoe and peered over. And even now, at this very moment, in full sight across the nearer slope of the moor she descried her Sam, not now in chase of a foolishly trustful visitor, but hotly pursued by what appeared to be the complete rabblement of Haggurdsdon's cats. Sore spent though he showed himself to be, Sam was keeping his distance. Only a few lank tabby gibs, and what appeared to be a grey-ginger Manx (unless he was an ordinary cat with his tail chopped off) were close behind.

"Same! Sam!" Miss Chauncey cried, and yet again, "Sam!" but in her excitement and anxiety her foot slipped on the flower-pot and in an instant the feline chase had fallen out of sight. Gathering herself together again, she

clutched a long besom or garden broom that was leaning against the wall, and rushed down to the point at which she judged Sam would make his entrance into the garden. She was not mistaken, nor an instant too soon. With a bound he was up and over, and in three seconds the rabble had followed in frenzied pursuit.

What came after Miss Chauncey could never very clearly recall. She could but remember plying her besom with might and main amid this rabble and mellay of animals, while Sam, no longer a fugitive, turned on his enemies and fought them cat for cat. None the less, it was by no means an easy victory. And had not the over-fatted cur from the butcher's in Haggurdsdon—which had long since started in pursuit of this congregation of his enemies—had he not at last managed to overtake them, the contest might very well have had a tragic ending. But at the sound of his baying and at sight of the cur's teeth snapping at them as he vainly attempted to surmount the wall, Sam's enemies turned and fled in all directions. And faint and panting, Miss Chauncey was able to fling down her besom and to lean for a brief respite against the trunk of a tree.

At last she opened her eyes again. "Well, Sam," she managed to mutter at last, "we got the best of them, then?"

But to her amazement she found herself uttering these friendly words into a complete vacancy. The creature was nowhere to be seen. His cream disappeared during the day, however, and by an occasional rasping sound Miss Chauncey knew that he once more lay hidden in his dingy resort behind the kindling-wood box. And there she did not disturb him.

Not until tea-time of the following day did Sam reappear. And then—after attending to his hurts—it was merely to sit with face towards the fire, sluggish and sullen and dumb as a dog. It was not Miss Chauncey's "place" to make advances, she thought. She took no notice of the beast except to rub in a little hog's fat on the raw places of his wounds. She was rejoiced to find, however, that he kept steadily to Post Houses for the next few days, though her

dismay was reawakened at hearing on the third night a more dismal wailing and wauling than ever from the sloe-bushes, even while Sam himself sat motionless beside the fire. His ears twitched, his fur seemed to bristle; he sneezed or spat, but remained otherwise motionless.

When Mr. Cullings called again, Sam at once hid himself in the coal-cellar, but gradually his manners toward Miss Chauncey began to recover their usual suavity. And within a fortnight after the full moon the two of them had almost returned to their old friendly companionship. He was healed, sleek, confident and punctual. No intruder of his species had appeared from Haggurdsdon. The night noises had ceased; Post Houses to all appearances—apart from its strange ugliness—was as peaceful and calm as any other solitary domicile in the United Kingdom.

But alas and alas. With the very first peeping of the crescent moon, Sam's mood and habits began to change again. He mouched about with a sly and furtive eye. And when he fawned on her, purring and clawing, the whole look of him was full of deceit. If Miss Chauncey chanced softly to enter the room wherein he sat, he would at once leap down from the window at which he had been perched as if in the attempt to prove that he had *not* been looking out of it. And once, towards evening, though she was no spy, she could not but pause at the parlour door. She had peeped through its crack as it stood ajar. And there on the hard sharp back of an old prie-dieu chair that had belonged to her pious great-aunt Jemima, there sat Sam on his hind-quarters. And without the least doubt in the world he was vigorously signalling to some observer outside with his fore-paws. Miss Chauncey turned away sick at heart.

From that hour on Sam more and more steadily ignored and flouted his mistress, was openly insolent, shockingly audacious. Mr. Cullings gave her small help indeed. "If I had a cat, m'm, what had manners like that, after all your kindness, fresh fish and all every week, and cream, as I understand, not skim, I'd—I'd give him away."

"To whom?" said Miss Chauncey shortly.

"Well," said the carrier, "I don't know as how I'd much mind to who. Just a home, m'm."

"He seems to have no friends in the Village," said Miss Chauncey in as light a tone as she could manage.

"When they're as black as that, with them saucer eyes, you can never tell," said Mr. Cullings. "There's that old trollimog what lives in Hogges Bottom. She's got a cat that might be your Sam's twin."

"Indeed no, he has the mange," said Miss Chauncey, loyal to the end. The carrier shrugged his shoulders, climbed into his cart, and bowled away off over the moor. And Miss Chauncey, returning into the house, laid the platter of silvery sprats on the table, sat down and burst into tears.

It was, then, in most ways a fortunate thing that the very next morning—three complete days, that is, before the next full-moontide—she received a letter from her sister-in-law in Shanklin, in the Isle of Wight, entreating her to pay them a long visit.

"My dear Emma, you must sometimes be feeling very lonely (it ran), shut up in that great house so far from any neighbours. We often think of you, and particularly these last few days. It's nice to have that Sam of yours for company, but after all, as George says, a pet is only a pet. And we do all think it's high time you took a little holiday with us. I am looking out of my window at this moment. The sea is as calm as a mill-pond, a solemn beautiful blue. The fishing boats are coming in with their brown sails. This is the best time of the year with us, because as it's not yet holiday-time there are few of those horrid visitors to be seen, and no crowds. George says you *must* come. He joins with me in his love, as would Maria if she weren't out shopping, and will meet you at the station in the trap. Emmie is now free of her cough, only whooping when the memory takes her and never sick. And we shall be looking forward to seeing you in a few days."

At this kindness, and with all her anxieties, Miss Chaun-

cey all but broke down. When the butcher drove up in his cart an hour or two afterwards, he took a telegram for her back to the Village, and on the Monday her box was packed, and all that remained was to put Sam in his basket in preparation for the journey. But I am bound to say it took more than the persuasions of his old protectress to accomplish this. Indeed Mr. Cullings had actually to hold the creature with his gloved hands, and none too gently, while Miss Chauncey pressed down the lid and pushed the skewer in to hold it close.

"What's done's dummed done!" said the carrier, as he rubbed a pinch of earth into his scratches. "But what I say is, better done for ever. Mark my words, m'm!"

Miss Chauncey took a shilling out of her large leather purse; but made no reply.

Indeed all this trouble proved at last in vain. Thirty miles distant from Haggurdsdon, at Blackmoor Junction, Miss Chauncey had to change trains. Her box and Sam's basket were placed together on the station platform beside half-a-dozen empty milk-cans and some fowls in a crate, and Miss Chauncey went to enquire of the stationmaster to make sure of her platform.

It was the furious panic-stricken cackling of these fowls that brought her hastily back to her belongings, only to find that by hook or by crook Sam had managed to push the skewer of the basket out of its cane loops. The wicker lid yawned open—the basket was empty. Indeed one poor gaping hen, its life fluttering away from its helpless body, was proof not only of Sam's prowess but of his cowardly ferocity.

A few days afterwards, as Miss Chauncey sat in the very room to which her sister-in-law had referred in her invitation, looking over the placid surface of the English Channel, the sun gently shining in the sky, there came a letter from Mr. Cullings. It was in pencil and written upon the back of a baker's bag:

"Dear Madam, i take the libberty of riteing you in referense to the Animall as how i helped put in is bawskit



which has cum back returned empty agenn by rail me having okashun to cart sum hop powles from Haggurdsdon late at nite ov Sunday. I seez him squattin at the parlor windy grimasin out at me fit to curdle your blood in your vanes and lights at the upper windies and a yowling and screeching such as i never hopes to hear agen in a Christian lokalety. And that ole wumman from Hogges Botom sitting in the porch mi own vew being that there is no good in the place and the Animall be bewitched. Mr. Flint the fyshmunger agrees with me as how now only last mesures is of any use and as I have said afore i am wiling to take over the house the rent if so be being low and moddrate considering of the bad name it as in these parts around Haggurdsdon. I remain dear madam waitin your orders and oblidge yours truely William Cullings."

To look at Miss Chauncey you might have supposed she was a strong-minded woman. You might have supposed that this uncivil reference to the bad name her family house had won for itself would have mortified her beyond words. Whether or not, she neither showed this letter to her sister-in-law nor for many days together did she even answer it. Sitting on the Esplanade, and looking out to sea, she brooded on and on in the warm, salt, yet balmy air. It was a distressing problem. But "No, he must go his own way," she sighed to herself at last; "I have done my best for him."

What is more, Miss Chauncèy never returned to Post Houses. She sold it at last, house and garden, and for a pitiful sum, to the carrier, Mr. Cullings. By that time Sam had vanished, had been never seen again.

Not that Miss Chauncey was faithless of memory. Whenever the faint swish of a sea-gull's wing sounded in the air above her head; or the crackling of an ascending rocket for the amusement of the visitors broke the silence of the nearer heavens over the sea; whenever even she became conscious of the rustling frou-frou of her Sunday watered-silk gown as she sallied out to church from the neat little villa she now rented on the Shanklin Esplanade—she never

noticed such things without being instantly transported back in imagination to her bedroom at Post Houses, to see again that strange deluded animal, once her Sam, squatting there on her patchwork counterpane, and as it were knitting with his fore-paws the while he stood erect upon his hind.

## *Biography*

ERA ZISTEL

CHRIS WAS A SMALL part of the litter borne by the big black cat in the fruit store. Indeed, he was the smallest part, the runt of the lot, the last of it, made up of leftovers. He didn't look like much, lying there gasping for breath, his skinny rat's tail inert, the wet black and white fur plastered on his scrawny little body.

Evidently his mother didn't think he looked like much either, for she gave him no more attention than a few licks that sent him sprawling over on his back with his helpless sticks of legs kicking feebly against the empty inhospitality of the new world. She was a wise mother, for this was her fourth litter. By this time she knew all about the survival of the fittest, and how useless it was to try to violate that law. So if this little one wanted to get back to the warmth of her, let him fight to get there—if he could. If he wanted food, let him fight for it—if he could. And if he could not, then let him die. There were plenty more fine strong ones snuggled against her belly. She would not miss him.

Chris did fight, and he did get back to her, but he was soon thrust aside again by his stronger brothers and sisters. So he did not get any food, and finally gave up struggling for it. Crawling around blindly, he found a spot where there was plenty of room, between his mother's front paws, and there he rested, with his head tucked under her chin.

The only time he ever got anything to eat was after the others had finished. He would wait until they had fallen asleep and dropped away from their mother like ripe fruit, then work his way cautiously among them and take what they had left. Sometimes he forgot to be cautious and nudged against one of them only half asleep; then there

was a brief battle that woke all the rest, and he was left waiting again. Sometimes there was no food left.

He didn't grow much. It was a miracle that he lived at all. Perhaps it was only because he used so little energy that he managed to make his inheritance from a healthy mother last over such an inconceivably long time; for he was very quiet. As his brothers and sisters gained strength and sight they played more and more wildly, kicking, biting, rolling over and over, chasing each other, engaging finally in a contest that none could win, scrabbling up the walls of their home to try to lift themselves over the top of it. During all these games Chris sat to one side, his paws tucked neatly under him, watching, occasionally being knocked over when one of them flew off at a tangent, occasionally having to move to another spot when the battle shifted to his neutral ground.

That was how he managed to live. It was his way of fighting.

One day, while they were playing thus, terror came among them. A strange thing crept into their home, seized them one by one to hold them high above it, then dropped them down again. Chris was the last to be disturbed. He was wondering what was happening to the rest of them, not expecting it to happen to him, because nothing ever did, when the thing clutched at the back of his neck and lifted him up. He squealed once with surprise, paddled the air trying to find a foothold in it, then hung down quietly and waited for the end. But a moment later he was back with his brothers and sisters again, none the worse for the adventure.

The others were very excited. They hissed and spat when he joined them, as if he himself were the stranger; then went round and round their home, inspecting every inch of it. When at last they were satisfied that all was as it should be, they huddled up to let sleep rid them of the unpleasant experience. Chris crawled on the top of the pile, where he always slept, and at once found a dream

that pleased him, in which he had all that he wanted to eat, but he was awakened again almost immediately by the thing at the back of his neck. This time it lifted him over the edge of his world, dropped him dizzily downward until he was caught and held by another thing. He looked at what was holding him, and thus for the first time in his life saw a Human Being.

She held him close, so that he could feel Her warmth and the movement of Her breathing. She spoke to him, and he stared at Her, his eyes round with wonder. It was as if he had heard that voice before, had known and loved it for a long time. He dug his claws in to get closer to Her, crawled up and at last found a place to rest with his head tucked under Her chin.

But he was not allowed to stay there long. Soon he was snatched away and swung through the air down into a new world with high walls. In a corner of it he crouched, shrinking away from its unfamiliarity. Then darkness closed around him. The world began to tip and sway, so that he slid helplessly from one side to the other, while from beyond came terrible noises, as if the darkness were full of roaring, battling monsters. He was frightened and cried for his mother, but she did not come.

Finally the noises died down and the world became steady and the darkness opened, and in the light above him he saw Her again. She lifted him out of the little world and put him down in a bigger one. It was bigger than he had thought any world could be, the walls of it being quite beyond his vision. Cautiously he crept around in it, sniffing, memorizing all the strange smells, and hunting for his mother.

After a while She put something in front of him that smelled like his mother. He approached it eagerly and nuzzled against it. It was warm, like his mother, but this warmth suddenly spread all over his face, flooded into his mouth and nose and choked him. He stared at it reproachfully for a moment, shook his head so vigorously that he upset himself, then got up and licked the sticky sweetness

from around his mouth. It was good. It was like his mother.

He went back to it. Again he was repulsed and retreated coughing and sneezing. But the accumulated hunger of his whole short life urged him to keep on trying. So at last he found a way to manage this vicarious mother. All he had to do was hold his breath, dip his mouth in and out and then lick off the sweetness. This, with some practice, he succeeded in doing quite rapidly. It was some time before he discovered another method that was much more efficient.

When he had finished, She picked him up. In Her lap he washed himself sketchily, hampered by his new rotundity, until the pleasant warmth of Her brought idleness to his tongue. He closed his eyes and purred, nudged against her questingly, trying to find his favourite spot under his mother's chin. Then the memory of his mother mingled with a comfortable awareness of Her, and at last he fell asleep.

The substitute for his mother was called "milk." Other names for it were "Areyouhungry" and "Doyouwantsomethingtoeat." These, in turn, became the names for other things as well. It was very confusing, but he managed to learn it eventually, and a great deal more besides: that "naughty" meant he had done something wrong, that "bad Chris" accompanied by a spanking meant a second offence. He learned that Chris was his name; indeed, he learned that too well, for sometimes when She mentioned him in conversation he jumped up and trotted over to Her. But above and beyond everything else was the way he learned to love Her.

When She was gone he crouched on the floor near the door that separated them, and no matter how long it might be, waited for Her return, listening for Her footsteps and hating whatever it was that had taken Her away from him. So he hated Her friends when they came, because although he could still see Her and touch Her, She was gone from him then, too, only in another way. In the beginning he

had tried scratching and biting them, but that made Her angry. So then he tried to lure Her away from them, going through, with grim abandon, all the antics that usually made Her laugh. And if that failed, then he simply made more noise than they, his rivals. For he, too, could talk.

Only they never understood him. They spoke a different language. Sometimes he even tried to imitate the sound of Her voice, using the same inflections and saying a great deal all at once, the way She did. But it was no use. Not even She ever really understood.

When he told Her friends how much he hated them, they laughed and petted him. When he told Her, in a long, elaborate sentence, of how much he loved Her, She was displeased and sent him away. Once when he complained to Her about the weather, which he was sure She controlled, as She did everything concerning his comfort, She answered by offering him something to eat!

Nor, for that matter, did he understand Her much better. Sometimes She would repeat the same thing over and over in Her language, saying it slowly and carefully and earnestly, and yet he could not comprehend. Sometimes then they would look at each other in a silence that was as immeasurable as all eternity holding them apart, until finally She would put Her hand down to stroke his head and he would rise to meet it halfway, and that became their common tongue.

But it wasn't until Ginger came that he really gave up trying. Ginger couldn't speak Her language either—and didn't even care; probably no one could but She and Her friends.

Ginger changed his ideas about a lot of things. In fact, Ginger changed his whole life.

She went away, and when She came back She was carrying a box. Chris liked boxes very much, and always welcomed them with eagerness. For each one, having been in many places, was like a new world to explore. And after he had become thoroughly familiar with the box itself,

there was still what was inside it to be looked over and approved or rejected, as the case might be. All in all, it was one of his most agreeable tasks, especially if the box happened to contain, as it so frequently did, the things that She called "books;" because each one of these was a new world also, pungent with the memory of strange hands and distant places. Often he went over to where She had them lined up against the wall, to consult them and ponder over what they told him.

So when he saw this box She was carrying, he ran over to greet it joyfully, but at once withdrew again, overcome by distaste. It was an entirely different kind of box; it rustled, and a strong animal smell came from it. Horrified, he backed away until he found refuge under a chair, where he crouched and peered out anxiously. The box rustled again. He opened his mouth, and out came a rasping sound that startled him, it was so unlike anything he had ever said before. But there was comfort and confidence in it, so he repeated it. The box answered with a piercing shriek, and danced about so wildly that it almost tore itself out of Her hands.

She laughed and began to talk to him. She said a great deal, but he could understand only one word, and it was "kitty." Kitty? That was another name for him.

She put the box on the floor. It shrieked and danced and bulged at the top. Then She opened it. Out shot something yellow, across the room and under a chair in one long arc of fury. Fiery eyes glinted in the dimness there, and from the vague shadow came the same hiss of wrath and fear that was in his own voice.

After a while She went to the other one and tried to pick it up. With a swift glide it eluded Her and made its home under another chair, where the gleam of its eyes shifted rapidly from Chris to Her and back again. Then she came over and picked him up. He trusted Her. But when She tried to put him down in front of the other one a bright whirl of utter madness took possession of him. Only after She had released him and he was once more



safe under his chair did he come to his senses again; it was only then that he heard the sharp exclamation of pain and reproach his claws had drawn from Her.

She went away, and he was miserable, listening to the echo of that reproach.

The gleaming yellow eyes regarded him with impersonal, menacing calm. They were alone together.

After a while the other one lifted his head. It looked around tentatively, swiftly back at Chris, then raised an experimental paw. Nothing happened. It slipped the paw forward and stood transfixed.

Chris did not move. The other eased out from under its chair, made a cautious tour of its own half of the room, then, having tested all things there and found them harmless, glanced past that known safety. Casually it padded out a circle in the middle of the room. Chris retreated. The other one promptly took possession of his shelter and gazed out triumphantly.

For a while it stayed there busily inspecting and approving of what had been his, but then, elaborately unaware of him, it made straight for him again. He managed to sidestep and selected a corner to sit in. The other immediately found something interesting, not in him, but in that very corner. So it went on, until at last She came back and the other one was subdued.

She called him, but although the fur on his back quivered, he would not go to Her. She called again and he answered with a high complaint. Then She talked to him, and he could not resist. Once he was in Her lap, nothing else mattered.

The eyes of the lonely, wild other one under the chair stared at them with blazing intensity, then grew dim and disappeared.

Ginger was queer, shy and aggressive at the same time, bold but mistrustful, hungry for affection, but afraid of it when it was offered. Soon She gave up trying to make friends with her, and then Chris suffered her presence with-

out protest. He was willing to give up anything but that magic circle in which She moved; and Ginger seemed to find that quite satisfactory. She had her own magic circle.

Up and down she raced, pursuing imaginary flies, escaping from imaginary foes, or chasing Chris's very own paper balls. She sunned herself in Chris's favourite place on the window ledge, padded about gravely inspecting his home that had now become all hers, slept first here, then there, her choice always being that spot he had chosen for himself. Nothing but these mattered; her possessions and her independence. Yet there were times when she looked thoughtfully, perhaps longingly, at Her and at Chris curled up in Her lap.

One day, after Ginger had been there quite a while, something strange happened.

The wind was blowing through the open window, billowing out the curtains that Ginger played with and ruffling the fur of Chris as he sat on the window ledge. It was one of those days when sky and air and earth keep drawing together tighter and tighter, until the pressure is unbearable and a blinding flash of light tears them apart again.

Chris sat on the ledge and felt the excitement that was in the air tingle in his body. The fur along his back rippled in a series of delicious shudders. Ginger played wildly, leaping at the curtains and away again, drawing a series of quick eccentric circles in the fading light, scrambling madly on the polished floor without getting anywhere, then up the back of a chair and after the curtains again. She seemed to have gone insane.

Chris watched her, and something stirred in him. He had never felt it before, and did not know what it was. Suddenly a bright light from the sky questioned, and the earth roared back an answer. He started, and involuntarily his head jerked around. As the rumble died away he got up, stretched, and yawned, as if to prove to himself that he had not lost his customary poise. But just then Ginger inscribed a graceful half circle through the air and landed

on the ledge beside him. They had never been so close to each other before.

Chris recoiled from her sharply and jumped to the floor, but instead of stopping there and after a decorous pause walking away with seemingly dignity, he kept on bounding across the room, and when he was on the far side of it opened his mouth to utter a peculiar wail that made his fur bristle.

Ginger looked at him, tossed her head mischievously, leaped upward to trace another half circle against the light, then ran lightly toward him. With a vehement hiss he drew back, but she was away at once—and he was pursuing her! Again the anguished wail escaped from his throat. Ginger stopped abruptly to listen to it, and he stopped, too, close beside her. They stood very still staring at each other, as if they were seeing each other for the first time. Another flash of light burned briefly in her yellow eyes and disclosed the wild tenderness there. Without moving she began to croon to him. Then all at once, like the bursting of the light and the roaring of the earth, he knew what it was that he felt.

For days he forgot everything but Ginger, forgot to eat, forgot to wash himself, forgot even Her. And then he slept, and when he awoke the interlude was no more than a dream. But he was painfully aware of the fact that he had deserted Her in that dream, and tried as best he could to erase it from Her memory. Wherever She went he was at Her heels, begging humbly, persistently for Her forgiveness, telling Her over and over that the infatuation for Ginger could not be compared with his deep and undying affection for Her, that it had been an incomprehensible lapse, that it would never happen again.

Nevertheless he and Ginger were good friends now, sharing food and bed and window ledge, and sometimes Her lap, too.

The days passed, one much like another, and the change in Ginger was so gradual that he scarcely noticed it. Yet

the time came when she seemed displeased with him again, and with everything else, for that matter, and kept going around restlessly as if she were searching for something.

Finally She brought home a large box and put something soft into it, and with eager satisfaction Ginger accepted it, scratching in the corners and digging her claws into the soft stuff. Chris sniffed at the box and also found it satisfactory, but when he tried to join her Ginger at once made it clear that it was her box and that she wished to be alone.

Yet it would be pleasant to lie there, curled up snugly, with the soft stuff billowing around on all sides. So while Ginger sunned herself on the window ledge he would steal into it and have a fine nap there; but the moment she jumped off the ledge he was out of it again.

Thus everything went well until the morning the box started making a noise. Faintly, almost inaudibly, it rustled and squeaked. There was something new about it, but in that newness was something strangely familiar, too. Chris peered in cautiously. The soft stuff was moving.

Ginger was away, so he jumped in. Immediately there was a terrible commotion, squealing and undulating all around his feet, and Ginger returning full of anxiety to fling herself down on her side and stare at him accusingly. With a disgusted grunt he retired. He would never go near that box again!

All of that day he spent sulking in a corner. He was even displeased with Her. Whatever it was, She should not have allowed it to happen. He refused to speak to Her, refused to go to Her, refused to eat, slept sitting in the corner until She made a bed for him there and he collapsed on it in weary gratitude.

The next day, however, was an entirely different day. No doubt the box had returned to normal again. So, as soon as Ginger left it, he began pacing around the room aimlessly, until quite accidentally he came close enough to look in. Nothing moved. With light and delicate tread he stepped in on the soft stuff.

Then the whole unpleasant procedure repeated itself,

the squealing and upheaval, and Ginger returning, and his retiring to the corner to mope. It couldn't go on like that. Something would have to be done. Finally he went to Her and appealed to Her in a long, breathless sentence of complaint and entreaty. She gave him an absent-minded pat, made a bed for him in the corner again, then went to fuss over Ginger and those new things.

That was more than he could bear. At once he went back, got into the box and waited for the commotion. It came, but he stayed. As soon as the little new things had gathered around Ginger and were quiet again he settled down, tucked his paws under him and stared at Ginger defiantly. She stared back, sleepily. Finally her eyes closed, and his head began to nod. The last thing he heard was Her laugh, and the last thing he felt was Her hand on his head, and that made everything all right.

When Ginger left the box he awoke with a start. The new ones were tumbling all around him, wailing noisily. Blindly seeking, they came over to him and snuggled against his belly. There was something very undignified and embarrassing about having them there, but no one seemed to be watching, and the warmth of them was not unpleasant, and the box with the soft stuff was comfortable. So he slept again, and the new ones were part of his sleep.

After that he didn't mind them. After that he lay there with them often, talking to them sometimes and washing their immaculate fur with an inept, affectionate tongue.

Even when they grew strong and bold and at last managed to scramble out of the box, so that from then on there was no peace anywhere, he really didn't mind having them around. When they awakened him by pouncing sharp-clawed on his tail an ill-timed dream had caused him to wave in his sleep, he did no more than stretch and yawn and lazily try to catch the next one to come flying past.

But once, while he was absent-mindedly twitching his tail to amuse them, he heard Her laugh, and that made all the difference in the world. He pricked up his ears and looked at Her. She was not laughing at him, She

was laughing at *them*. There was no doubt about it. She was watching them, not him. He got up quickly and walked away. She did not even notice that he had left. He waited a moment, then, having made a swift decision as to which of his tricks She seemed to like the best, made a sudden leap and executed a beautiful slide across the polished floor. She paid no attention to him. But the little ones did! They all came chasing after, half mad with glee. And She laughed twice as hard, and there was really no way of telling just what She was laughing at. So he did it again.

From then on he played earnestly, with a business-like zest, repeating the special slide performance over and over, until one by one the others tired and fell out of the game, or until She turned away.

That was his way of fighting for Her.

He didn't notice when one of them was missing, nor even when two were gone, but finally there was only a lonely little pattering of feet following him, and it seemed to him something was wrong. Where were all the rest? He played with the one that was left, and kept expecting the others to rush out at him from somewhere at almost any moment, but they did not come, and the game petered out with the one that was left wandering off somewhere on its own.

It stayed with them a while longer. Then one day when Ginger called to it, there was no scrambling out of the box, no rustling from some remote corner, no answering squeak and pattering of feet. As quietly and mysteriously as the others, it had disappeared.

In a way, it was better that they were gone. Now he was sure that Her laugh belonged only to him. But She did not laugh so much, and an almost deafening silence lay everywhere, even in his dreams.

It occurred to him that it might amuse Her if he played with Ginger a bit. But he soon found out that Ginger would not play.

There was evidently something the matter with her. Not only did she refuse to play, but she seemed to have lost interest in everything. Each day she became less active, until at last she spent most of her time on the window ledge, her eyes wide open, staring at nothing.

Sometimes she would get up wearily and go to their plate of food, but she never touched anything. Sometimes she would wander pensively around the room, stopping to look for a long time at each place where she had lain contented, then turn away as if she had been refused the aid she had hoped might be given her.

Back on the ledge, in the sun, she would slowly settle herself in passive acceptance. And often, although she remained quite still, it seemed that she was going away.

Then one morning she was not there, not on the window ledge, not on any of the chairs, nor anywhere else in the room. Silently and persistently Chris searched for her, until at last She took him to a small room where he had never been before. The air in it was heavy with a sharp, sweet scent that terrified him. For although he had never met it before, he knew what it was. It was death.

Ginger was lying there on the floor in a patch of slanting sunlight. He went over to her slowly, bent his head to greet her, then recoiled. The death was with her. Slowly he backed away. She picked him up and carried him out of the room and closed the door.

He did not search for her after that, but in his own way he grieved for her. Often he would go to the chair that was her favourite bed, or to the window ledge where the memory of her lingered for a while, and put his head down flat against it to be with her. But at last even that memory of her faded and was gone, and he was alone again.

So, just as Ginger had changed everything when she came, everything was changed to what it had been now that she was gone.

He went back to waiting at the door for Her again, while She was away, and hating whatever it was that kept Her from him. He even hated the door itself, and some-

times tore at it with his claws. But the noise that made only brought the silence crowding closer around him when he stopped. It never brought Her.

No matter how long She might be away, he never slept during those hours, so that by the time She returned he was usually worn out. Yet he had to coax Her somehow into never leaving him again. So, in spite of his weariness, he would sing for Her and dance for Her, and slide across the floor and chase paper balls, until at last She would stoop down and let him put his paws on Her shoulder. Then followed the good, quiet part of Her return. She would lift him and carry him over to the window, and they would spend some time there, while he purred and dug his claws into Her shoulder and, with his ears tipped forward, pretended each day to see for the first time the tiny golden things that danced in the sunlight, and a great many other things that weren't there at all.

At first it was no more than this restlessness that kept him awake all the time. It seemed that, although he was very tired and wanted more than anything else to have a good long nap, he must be constantly getting up and stretching himself and washing his fur, not with his usual vigorous efficiency, but with a nervous haste and lack of system that in itself irritated him. What he felt in his legs was in the beginning a laziness, then a strange singing, as if they were made up of hundreds of little wires being played upon, then a numbness accompanied by a cold, remote pain.

He continued to play for Her, but each time it became more of an effort. Then one day something happened that made them both realize something was wrong, had been wrong for a long time.

She had just come home, and after his usual prancing, just a bit more stiff-legged than usual, that was all, he tried one of his slides across the floor. Suddenly his back legs refused to hold him up, splayed out, and forced him to complete the slide by ignominiously coasting along on his



belly. It lasted no more than a moment, that weakness. Before She had even stopped laughing he was up and defiantly sliding back to Her again.

But She had noticed. He knew She had noticed because She picked him up quickly and then just stood there for a long time holding him tight, as if She thought he wanted to go away, so tight that he could not tell whether the trembling was in his body or Her hands.

She brought a box and put him into it and shut out the light, and in the darkness around him a dim memory seemed to stir uneasily. He cried, and She answered. Then he was quiet. The box began to tip and sway, so that he could not keep his balance, and the darkness seemed all at once to turn into a roaring inferno, filled with the memory of terrible monsters hurling themselves against each other.

But after a while these noises subsided, and were replaced by others, and a strong animal smell came sweeping in; then almost immediately that was cut off also, as if something solid had been closed against it. He heard Her voice again, and the darkness opened. She was there bending over him, and a stranger was beside Her, looking at him too.

She put him on the floor and the stranger stooped over to stroke him. The hand was firm and friendly, and when the stranger spoke Chris responded as he had never done before to any of Her friends, he rubbed himself a little against the stranger's leg. Here was another Human Being he felt he might love.

So when he was offered a piece of string to play with, he hopped after it obediently. But he could not make the stranger laugh, nor Her, and he tired quickly. Then the stranger patted a smooth chair without any soft stuff on it. Chris stared at the hand doubtfully, then looked from one to the other of them. He knew what they wanted him to do, but he did not think he could do it.

After a time She also began to plead and pat the chair; so he jumped, scrabbled helplessly for a moment with the claws of his front paws caught on the edge of the chair,

then fell heavily to the floor. There he lay, with the cold grey pain whirling around him faster and faster, until there was nothing left but that.

When he became aware of Her again, She was putting him back into the box. He tried to cling to Her, but the pain carried him away. It made him indifferent to everything, to all the smells and all the sounds and even to his own fear, until his nostrils caught the scent of home again. Home! That got him to his feet, and set him to scratching away at the darkness to try to get through to it. Home! When She let in the light and he saw everything familiar and beloved around him just as always, he gave a cry of joy and sprang out of the box.

Only it was just his imagination that leapt so happily into the room. All his body did was lurch over on its side.

He was in the little room where he had last seen Ginger. He could not walk any longer. There was no pain now, only a cold grey lifelessness. His legs were stretched out stiff and were no longer a part of him. His whole body was really no longer a part of him. It lay heavy, inert, useless, while he floated above it, held to it only by a thread so slight that the next breath, the next instant dropping into eternity might break it apart.

His eyes were wide open, and through the mists he could see Her sitting there beside him. She did not touch him. Remotely, from the height where he watched, he was grateful to Her for not stroking that body to which he was still attached. For he was too far away to respond with any sign of pleasure. But he was glad that She was there. He would not be so frightened when the thread snapped and the thickening mists whirled him away.

He did not want to go away. He wanted to stay with Her. Up above he began struggling violently to get closer to Her, and down there his body twitched a little. She bent over it, carefully lifted it and turned it on its other side. That was good. There was peace for a moment, the thread became slack, his eyes closed. But only for a

moment. In the thick whirling mists he was alone and afraid. He opened them again.

She was still there.

All through this long night that was so close to the night that would never end, and through the many that followed, he fought with his eyes on Her, fought to get nearer to Her. Then one morning when the sun rose he thought he could feel the warmth of it on his body again. Slowly he descended through the cold mists to rest in it. At last his eyes closed, and he slept.

That battle they fought together seemed to change their relationship with each other. It was no longer love he felt so much now as a sense of *belonging* to Her. It was as if, having saved him from becoming part of that endless night, She had made him a part of Herself instead. He was Hers now so completely that nothing, not even another Ginger, could ever for a moment make him forget her again.

Although he could walk in an awkward, stiff-legged fashion, he was not yet entirely well when She began to do strange things. First She brought home a great many boxes; but She took nothing out of them, She put things into them instead: all the books, and all the other small things in their home, until the whole place seemed to ring with emptiness. And then, even before he got used to having it like that, something even worse happened.

Early one morning She opened the door and let in three giant Human Beings. He did not like them and hissed at them, but they only roared and pushed him aside and then, to his horror, began taking all Her boxes away. He went to Her at once and reported them, but She paid little attention, and later amidst the growing confusion he actually saw Her talking to them and helping them. It was utterly incredible, but She was allowing them to carry off their home. Bit by bit it disappeared, the place where She slept, his favourite chair, his second best chair, everything, until there was nothing left but the memory of

familiarity and the sound of his steps crossing the bare floor loud and sad with emptiness.

He was surprised when the giants came back again. They had taken everything, what else could they want? They stood there looking at him and he stared back at them defiantly, and still it did not occur to him what they wanted; not until She brought in another box and put it on the floor and then began to talk to him. There was something in Her voice that told him. But no! He would not let them take him away from Her, too!

He crouched down and moaned. One of the giants strode over and reached out a hand. He backed away hissing and spitting. Then She picked him up. He trusted Her. He did not think She would do it. How could She?

But She handed him over to the giant, and the giant put him into the box and closed it around him, and that was the end of everything. She had betrayed him.

This box was different from the other one he had been in; it had a small opening at one end. He put his nose to it and caught the odour of the giant and retreated, but then in spite of himself he had to return to look out, for he was being taken into the inferno again. Now he saw what made all the noise: big, swiftly moving evil creatures gliding around everywhere and hooting at each other; really monsters much as he had imagined them, but not fighting, only dodging about avoiding each other with marvellous agility, considering their bulk.

The box he was in stopped moving, then suddenly was raised and flung directly into the jaws of one of the monsters standing nearby. Chris shut his eyes and waited for the great teeth to crush him, but nothing happened.

After a while he got up courage enough to look out of his small window again, and discovered he could see right through the monster. Perhaps he was just behind one of its eyes. And what he saw seemed quite incredible, for She was standing there! Apparently She was waking the monster, for a moment later it began to move.

First it swayed and sighed, then it shuddered and coughed, and then it began to purr. Gliding over to join a lot of others of its kind, it became a part of a procession, with another procession going in the opposite direction. For some time they all kept together like that, but then one by one the others turned aside and vanished, until at last the one Chris was in was the only one left. But still it kept on going.

It was going into a new world, a very fine world, from what Chris could see of it, all broad and flat, stretching out endlessly and shimmering in the sun. What a joy it would be to get out and run in it! But still they went on, until they came to a place where the world rose sharply and they had to climb its sides. Evidently the monster found that very hard to do, for it went slower now and began to wheeze.

Yet on they went, and on, until all at once something terrible happened. The monster began to falter. Its purr was choked off, it gave a sickening lurch and with a groan of exhaustion came to a stop.

The sudden silence was intolerable. Chris clawed frantically at his window, trying to enlarge it. He cried out to the monster to awake, to go on, to purr again, or bellow—anything to let him know that it was still alive. It stirred slightly and moaned. Its bones creaked. Then it gasped, and suddenly Chris felt his box lifted and lowered again. He looked through his window. He was outside the monster.

Then he heard Her voice. She had not betrayed him after all, of course She had not! The box opened and She was bending over to stroke him, talking to him with a joy and excitement in Her voice that was as new as the sharp, clear air that he breathed. He felt the intoxication of it, too, yet when She walked away and called to him to follow, he hesitated. So many unknown smells, such strange soft stuff to walk upon! Did he dare?

He put out a tentative paw. The soft stuff cushioned it pleasantly and caressed his leg. It was agreeable. It made

him want to leap into it, roll in it, go bounding after Her, then back again and round and round in a wide circle of abandon. He put out another timid paw, then crawled from the box, distrust making his stiff legs even more awkward than usual. The soft stuff whispered around his feet, the gentle wind brought hundreds of strange odours to his nostrils.

He stood still and sniffed thoughtfully. Back there in the old world he believed he had learned all there was to know. But now here was another world, much larger, so large that he could not see its walls, and everything in it still to be learned: the source of each of those smells, the identification of all he saw around him, and its relation to himself. What part of it would bring him pleasure; and what pain? Even in the soft stuff there might be danger as well as delight. But where? Near or far? From what must he run to safety, and safety, where was that?

She called, and he made a wayward path toward Her, detouring to inspect this and that, stopping, turning back to catch again that whiff of something interesting, pre-occupied, excited and worried. At last he caught up with Her. She was standing in front of an immense box, and now She opened a door into it and they went inside. It was empty as that place they had left so long ago, before the monster had swallowed him. But She was putting something on the floor of it, a box that She had been carrying. He went over to it. It was his old box, and inside it was the soft stuff that had been his bed ever since he could remember. He climbed into it and snuffed and snuffed, as if he could not get enough of the smell of it. Then he stopped trembling. Here was the safety, here was home. After a while he settled down, and then he slept, dreaming of the past, while the future waited for him to awake.

It had no walls. Each day he tried to find them, going a little further to look for them, anxious to know how far he might go from Her and still be with Her. But no

matter which way he went, or how far he went, it continued past seeing, without any walls to shut him in. It would have terrified him if it hadn't been for Her. But he knew nothing would ever happen to him, nothing *could* ever happen to him, as long as She was there, and of course She always was there, when he needed Her.

She was there that time when he first met the water and thought he could walk on it and sank into it instead; She pulled him out and dried him off and laughed a little, too. She was there to snatch him out of the way when the huge animal with horns lowered its head to answer his challenging hiss with an angry bellow. She was there to chase away the other one who tried to annoy him by darting out from ambush to attack him and sprint lithely away again too swiftly for his sluggish legs to follow. She came running to his rescue the evening the snarling red beast that barked and prowled around each night—the "fox," She called it—surprised him on the way home and very nearly caught him. She was always there. He had no need to fear.

In all his life that now seemed so long to him, he had never been so happy as this. There were no hours spent waiting for Her behind a closed door; there were no friends to hate, no need to worry about when She would leave, when She would return, or what She was planning to do next. For each day was exactly like the one before, and their very sameness made them perfect.

In the morning, soon after the rising of the sun, he would awake and ask Her to let him out into the cool, new air. She would open the door, then close it again between them, and he would stand there for a while just on the other side of it, savouring the confidence that he could have it opened and go right back in again if he wished, and surveying the territory he must explore.

For it was during the morning that he tried to find the walls; climbing over rocks, scrambling through brush, padding noiselessly on the clean soft carpet under old trees, sinking into deep leaf mould, leaping over the running

water and skirting the still pools and making a wide detour around the big boxes in which other Humans lived. But always, at a certain time, he turned and started back home again. It was so that he would be there when She lay in the sun and seemed to have nothing to do but listen to him relate the story of his morning's adventures.

This was the best part of the day. He would tell Her of everything he had seen, of everything that had happened, and end up with his usual complaint that, in spite of all his seeking, he had not yet found the walls. And She would lie there quietly and listen and stroke his head and sometimes laugh at just the right moment, so that he was almost sure that She had understood.

Then, in a little while, when he could think of nothing more to say, and the sun on his fur became too hot, he would go away again, but not very far. In the shade nearby was his favourite rock, and there he settled down, his head between his paws, his eyes half closed, to watch with lazy interest the busy life that buzzed and crawled and whirred and leaped and floated and sang all around him. Sometimes he put out a paw to catch one of the jumping things that never ceased to startle him when they snapped just beneath his nose and then floated away in long arcs into invisibility. Sometimes, by accident, he did catch one. It wriggled deliciously, and for a while he would keep it imprisoned, appreciating its attempts to escape with ears tilted forward and eyes bright with excitement. But at last he would tire of it, and with a pretended fumble release it, to watch sleepily as it righted itself and poised for the spring. Then, just as always, it would snap under his nose and make him jump, and go sailing off through the air.

After that he would stretch out full length to sleep for a while, and in his dreams live through the morning walk all over again, and catch any number of jumping things between his paws that twitched a little while he slept. But he never failed to wake before She left. When She went away he was always there to watch Her go. He did not follow Her, but after She was gone he would go part way



up the path She had taken, and on a flat rock close by, keep a sharp lookout for Her return.

Perhaps this was really the best part of the day; for he knew She would not be gone long, and that when She came back She would bring him something to eat. Yes, surely it was, because then they played the Game. She would call to him, and he would not go to Her or answer. Instead he would crouch behind the tall grass at the edge of the path and wait until She was quite near, then with a cry leap out at Her so that She jumped back, startled, and then they would race each other home, and of course he always won.

Yes, that was the best part of the day—although maybe the afternoons were better still. That was when they went for a walk together, deep into the woods. And as soon as he got tired all he had to do was tell Her so; She would stoop down so that he could put his paws on Her shoulder, and thus he would go riding back again, like a king.

Only if the sky was grey and the world outside wet and dismal, they stayed at home instead. Then She did things with Her hands, or spent hours looking at one of the books he could read in a sniff, and he lay on Her lap dreaming. And that was good, too, for they were together.

There was no part of it, not one small second of any day that he would have changed. But it changed itself.

She changed.

At first he thought the fault was his when She no longer listened attentively to the narration of his morning's adventures. So he began to stay away longer and longer, going farther and farther afield, not searching for walls now, but for something that might interest Her, fighting through thorny tangles and dense woods, going over swamps and into caves where the smell of other animals was terrifyingly strong, coming home worn out, dirty and desperate to tell Her how desperate he was. But still She did not listen.

Then one morning She was not there. He went to the place where he should find her lying in the patch of sun-

light, where the grass was flat and brown from Her lying on it, and She was not there. He lay down for a while there and waited for Her, his sides still heaving from the exertion of his walk, his head flat against the earth where he could hear Her footsteps approaching; but She did not come.

Then, when the sun on his fur became too hot, he moved to his rock in the shade, paying no attention to the busy life that buzzed and crawled and whirred and leaped and floated and sang around him, but keeping his eyes fixed on that spot of brown, flattened grass where She should be.

The time came for Her to go away, and still She had not come. He went up the path as far as the flat rock where he always waited for Her and sat there alert and watchful, ready to leap behind the clump of grass the moment She should appear in the distance. But She did not come.

The hour for his dinner passed. It was time for their afternoon walk. While he sat waiting on the rock part of him took the walk with Her, telling Her soon how tired he was, so that he might ride home on Her shoulder. For a moment it seemed so real that he could almost feel the security and comfort of Her arms holding him. A short wail escaped from his throat. He was very hungry.

At last he saw Her, just when the shadows were lengthening. She was quite far away, but still he had to leap at once behind the clump of grass, wriggling with joy, getting ready to pounce out in front of Her. But then he had to wait too long. By the time She came he was tired again. And the pounce was somehow mismanaged, for it did not surprise Her and didn't make Her laugh. There was no race home. She seemed to have forgotten it. He followed Her slowly and went inside with Her and ate the dinner She gave him, and that was all there was to the beautiful day.

Because he did not want to miss Her again, he went for only a short walk the following morning and came back very early. Yet She was not on Her patch of grass when

he got there. Of course he had never been there that early before. Perhaps it was too early. He waited as he had the day before, moved to the shade, got up and walked along the path to his rock and waited for Her there.

Again the time for his dinner came and passed. He was not hungry today. He did not go on the afternoon walk with Her. He did not feel the comfort of Her arms holding him. He did not cry. And when he saw Her in the distance he did not hide behind the clump of grass to surprise Her as She came by.

She was not alone.

With Her was another Human Being. They came up the path talking and laughing together, and they went by the clump of grass where he should be hiding without a pause. He looked after them and watched them go inside and stayed where he was, sitting on the rock where he always waited for Her to come home.

After a while She called him. He went to Her and followed Her inside. The Other One put down a hand to stroke him. It was a good hand, one that he would have liked if it had not touched Her. He allowed it to glide over his back, then slipped from under it and went away. The hand that had stroked him was raised to join Hers.

He knew it would not do any good now to make a lot of noise, or slide across the floor, or chase a paper ball. This was different.

Finally She remembered his dinner. She put it down on the floor and called him, and he went over to it but turned away without touching any of it. She did not notice.

He asked to be let out again, hoping She would refuse, as She had so often before, and take him on Her lap and talk to him instead. She did not even seem to hear him. But when he kept on asking, the Other One told Her. Then She got up and opened the door. For a while he stood just outside, with the door closed between them again, not knowing what to do. At last he went to the rock where he always waited for Her.

She did not come.

He waited until the shadows lengthened and he knew it was time for him to go in. He got up and stretched, turned away from watching the place where She always appeared in the distance and looked toward home. Then he sat down again.

The shadows darkened and thickened and closed around him. He shuddered, although he was not cold, and bunched himself together tighter, crouching low. The rock beneath him began to glow a little, as if the ghost of a sun were shining on it. From the grass came stealthy rustlings and squeakings and chirpings. Far away the fox was barking.

She did not come.

He should be inside now lying in his box, dreaming of the good day that had just passed, or in Her lap, purring, with Her hand stroking him. It was so vivid for a moment that he could see Her looking down at him and smiling, and feel the touch of Her hand. He stood up suddenly and let the short, sharp cry of anguish pierce the darkness between them.

Would She hear that? It was as if his body itself had escaped along with that cry, had sped swiftly home to Her and was now lying warm and contented in Her arms, with the Other One gone away.

From not quite so far away there was an answer. The fox barked.

Would She hear that? Would She come? Always when he needed Her She was there. And yet he was trembling.

The rustling and squeaking and chirping around his feet grew bolder. The ghostly light on the rock grew brighter, carving his figure out of the blackness of the night like a cameo. A moisture began to coat his fur, the rock on which he sat, and dropped on the grass like reluctant rain.

He raised his head, listened intently, searched the air with his nostrils.

Would She come now? There was still time. Would she come?

Just behind him there was a louder rustling in the grass,

a stealthy gliding through it. He did not look toward the sound. He looked toward home.

Would She come? Would She miraculously appear at his side, just when he needed Her?

He heard the breathing close, creeping upon him, and turned to face the two points of fire gleaming through the grass. He had scarcely time to brace himself before the silent rushing mass of shadow was upon him. The impact threw him over on his back. He kicked wildly against the heavy body, dug his claws into the matted fur.

Sharp teeth fastened on his throat. There was only a moment to think of Her, to realize She had not come. Then the white light of pain shot through Her image and broke it into a thousand shivering splinters. Mist whirled above him, thickened and descended to crush him into itself. The night that was endless swept over everything.

## *The Cat I never fed*

"ELEANOR FARJEON FEEDS ALL THE STRAY CATS  
IN NEW YORK!"

IN THE SPRING OF 1938, this warm and generous misstatement appeared in a big American daily. It was as near the truth as a complete misstatement can be. It is the only lie about myself that I have ever taken to my heart. For in spirit, that April and May, I did feed every stray cat I saw on the sidewalk, or in the gutter, or flying from shouts and missiles across the road; every little skinny unfed cat whose bones and terrors would have been a phenomenon in Hampstead, three thousand miles away. How gladly I would have fed all the stray cats in New York. In fact, I did not feed one of them.

Yet—didn't I? Do not the starving crave other food besides milk and fish?

How did this falsely-true announcement creep into the headlines?

On April 4th I saw the New York skyline for the first time in my life. Marc Connelly was to produce a "musical" by my brother and myself. I had sailed under the pretence that I could help him. My coming had been announced, and I knew what I must expect: the photographers, the interviewers, the talks over the radio, the speeches and public appearances of the sort I have eluded in England all my life. Somehow I escaped them on the docks; the cameras and notebooks were probably congregated round the First Class gangway, in wait for Heifetz, while I sneaked unsuspected from the Second Class. But at the theatre the first person Marc introduced me to was his publicity agent. She was a charming woman, and I threw myself on her mercy.

"For fifty-seven years," I said, "I have lived in a certain

way that is necessary to my happiness. In England I am never interviewed or photographed. I can't let a month in New York upset the foundations of half a century."

She was an understanding woman, and she believed me. "I promise you that you shan't be pestered. Nobody shall photograph or ask you questions. Only—you must let *me* do the talking and the write-ups. I won't say anything you won't care to read."

She was as good as her word. I saw very little of what she scattered through the press, and nothing that misrepresented me. Until one morning:

"ELEANOR FARJEON FEEDS ALL THE STRAY CATS  
IN NEW YORK"

One of my biggest wrenches in leaving London had been the farewells to my cats: to tabby Pickle, white-and-orange Nonny, golden Coney, and Bunny, the brindled mother of a hundred kits. Never had any of these four wanted for food and fire and love. In Hampstead such cats are the rule, not the exceptions. Plump and glossy felines grace almost every doorstep, or lie curled in sleep behind almost every window. Not a shop without its cat, known to the customers. The Undertaker had two who posed among the caskets like show-pieces in black and white marble. The Sweep's Sooty was a queer smudged fellow in ebony-and-smoke. The Sweetshop's semi-Persian lolled orientally on a chair while we purchased unrationed our Rahat Lakoum; the Butcher's plebeian tabby fawned on its hind-legs for chops and steaks from our shopping baskets; the Dairy kitten was everybody's pet. We loved our own cat best; but the better we loved our own, the more tender we were to all others. In Hampstead a hungry, frightened cat was not to be borne; and if accident sent us a stray, it was fed at half-a-dozen doors, till it was taken in at one.

But in New York, in the Spring of 1938, when the Depression was still the city's worst disease, and on Sixth

Avenue the queues of the unemployed were a shame and a sorrow—

"All the cats I see in the streets look so hungry," I said.

"I guess they are," said one of the boys on the stage. "They used to have the garbage bins to hunt in. But now they don't even have those. The men get there first."

The cats in the streets were not only empty of food, they were full of fear. They were a hunted clan. People did not stop to stroke them and rub their jaws; it was the rule to jeer and chase and throw things at them. If happy, well-fed cats there were, they lived unseen of the populace. They did not sun themselves on steps or sleep in windows. They did not eye passers-by with the indifference that is their prerogative, or the confidence that is our pleasure—the indifference of security, the confidence of amity. They crouched and lurked, they slunk and fled. I could hardly bear it.

While I ached for them all, I hankered for one to fondle. The theatre soon knew it. They came to know all about Pickle, and Nonny, and Coney, and Bunny the Eternal Maternal. "If you're so lonesome for a kitty," said one of the girls, "my greengrocer has one he'd loan you while you're here." But I was a guest in an apartment on Park Avenue where the infinite hospitality lavished on me did not include a welcome for a kitten. In the many swell apartments where I visited I often met many dogs, but never once a cat. The greengrocer's kitten remained among the cabbages.

And then, one moonlit April night, coming home from a late rehearsal, I saw my little cat. I was crossing to Park Avenue from Madison. The block was fast asleep. In a few hours it would be humming with traffic again, with jeering boys to flee from and whizzing wheels to dodge. But this was the hour when silence brought the hiders out of their holes. One of them lay stretched on the stone parapet of the steps of a house. A little black



cat, the thinnest of little black cats. We had the block to ourselves. I approached it, as I would any cat three thousand miles away.

"Hullo, pretty." I stretched out my hand.

It looked at me, quivered, and fled across the road. It lost itself in shadows. I did not attempt to follow.

The next night I came again by the same route; and there, taking the air on the same parapet, was my little cat. I had hardly dared to hope, but there it was. I stepped as unalarmingly as I could, and it watched my approach with big suspicious eyes, ready to run. Before I was within touching range, I stopped. I spoke, and it listened. I did not move my hand; and before I went on I stepped off the sidewalk into the middle of the road, so that I should not seem a danger as I passed the house.

It followed me with its eyes. It had not stirred.

The third night it was there in its wonted place. And now it did stir. I had slowed my steps as before, but as I drew near the house it sped along the parapet to meet me; and when we came abreast it leapt into my arms, stretched its paws about my neck, and began to purr. Had it ever in its brief life purred before? I fondled its meagre frame as I fondled the velvet curves of Golden Coney. I spoke to it as I spoke to my wise Bunny. It was as fearless in my hands as Pickle or Nonny. After a while I set it back gently on its own step, and hastened to my apartment, where everybody had been long abed.

My host had a refrigerator like a small room. I rifled it. I forget now what I took besides milk and a saucer. Chicken or meat. Ten minutes after I had left the street I was back again. The cat was not there.

No matter. We had gone all the way together, and there were many nights to come for meat and drink. It should be surprised with food, and I would see it fatten. But hardly on my host's refrigerator. Next day before rehearsal I raked the shops. I found one where I bought fried fish, and arrived with a little parcel at the theatre. By now the company knew that I had found a cat, and

had learned the details. I had to confess the contents of the parcel.

Once more the moon on the up-town block as before, and the quiet, deserted street. I stopped at the corner to undo my greasy package, in readiness to lay out on the parapet. The little cat was not in its usual place. I waited awhile, calling softly among the shadows; it did not appear. I left the fish by the steps and went home.

Next day the girl whose greengrocer had a kitten to lend came with a covered dish. "I cooked this for your kitty." I loved her for doing it; but I think I knew even then that my kitty would never taste it. And so it was. The parapet was bare. Night after night I came prepared with food. Night after night I left it to be found by the hungry. I never saw my thin black cat again.

Was it enough, once in its meagre life, to have lost fear and learned trust? Once to allow strange hands to hold and caress it? Once to have purred as cats purr who are loved? Had it chosen deliberately to withdraw at the peak of happiness? Or was it only one of the next day's casualties among the wheels and the jeers? I shall never know.

"ELEANOR FARJEON FEEDS ALL THE STRAY CATS  
IN NEW YORK."

I never fed one. Or did I—just one, just once?

## *Ginger: an Outlaw*

F. G. TURNBULL

I HAD SEEN the old she-cat of the woods many times, but always she saw me first. Her dim, grey form arose from the rocks and drifted up the bank of a Highland stream where I fished one day in April. She halted on the crest of a ridge to look back at me, then vanished down the other side. I could see that she would soon have kits; probably in one or another of the neighbouring burrows.

The old cat was feral—that is the name given to members of her tribe which, scorning the luxury of human protection, have taken to the woods and reverted to their natural mode of life. She, however, was two generations removed from the hearth-rug. Her mother had returned to the wild, and my transient friend was born amid the ferns in a rock-cleft by the running water.

That there was still a trace of the old life in the grey cat, I was quite certain. Always when we met, she stopped to gaze at me before passing out of sight. At these moments there seemed to be an infinite longing in her attitude: a longing to linger, to speak to me, to take me, just for a little, on trust, that she might fathom the dimly understood bond which she felt to exist between us. There was wistfulness rather than fear and hatred in her look. But ever the older, wilder instincts brushed aside the promptings of the present, and with a whisk of her heavy tail the cat would turn about and stalk away.

The next time I saw her, she was dead. In the bracken, whence the grey crows had lifted and blown away, her body lay quite flat and sodden with rain. Round her neck was a tightly drawn snare. Her eyes were gone and her side was ripped open. That, of course, was the work of the crows.

I pulled the snare pin up, and lifting the thick-set, furry

body by the wire thrust it into a rabbit stop and blocked the entrance with a stone to keep the crows out. The beetles would finish her off. The Sextons, I mean. They burrow into carcasses, lay their eggs, and the grubs consume the decaying matter; then everything is fresh and clean again. It's the better way.

As I waded upstream, I wondered how the kits had fared. It seemed a coincidence that I should find one of them half an hour later. It was the only one I ever found, although, no doubt, there were others.

The hysterical cries of mobbing blackbirds betrayed the little creature's presence. I said to myself, "The birds have found the old owl up at the linn rocks." But, no; I was mistaken. Here, on a branch, was hunched a yellow-furred kitten about ten or twelve weeks old. His fur bristled as he stared at me with great amber eyes. If ever anything embodied and expressed ferocity and courage in their most concentrated degree, it was this little fiend before me. Being feral, he was much bigger than a domesticated kit of the same age, but he was pitifully thin. How he had survived the weeks following his mother's death must ever remain a mystery.

When I approached, the kitten tried to turn round upon the branch, but his hind feet slipped off. Whilst he clung with his forepaws, trying to scramble up again, I grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and lifted him down. No blue-blooded wildcat could have been more vicious than this squalling little demon in his fight for freedom. In the end his own physical weakness defeated him; he became limp in my grasp, and mewed sadly.

In the hope of cheering his forlorn little soul, I spoke to him gently. "Poor little chap," I said, "you're missing that old grey mother of yours, aren't you? And you are hungry; there seems to be nothing inside your skin but yourself."

He looked so pathetic, I tried to stroke his head, but his keen little hooks lashed out for my hand, and I did not try again.

Curious to know how a return to human habitation and its comforts would affect the waif of the wild, I decided to take him home. We had a real battle when I tried to put him in my creel, and when I succeeded, he crouched in the bottom growling in a most alarming manner. Then I continued fishing.

Some time later, I thoughtlessly rested my hand on the creel lid. Instantly, a yellow leg shot through the hole and four razor-edged claws scored crimson furrows across my fingers. I slung the creel farther round my back after that.

When fishing on this stream, I usually go at midday to an adjacent farm, called The Craigs, for something to eat. Bob Ross, the farmer, is an old acquaintance of mine. He and his wife, Jean, never fail to extend a hearty welcome when I call.

Whilst we were at the table, I described the kitten I had captured. Bob was very interested; he asked what I meant to do with it.

"Well," I said, "I'll fatten it up a bit first, then see if I can re-domesticate it. If it can be taught to remain on the floor, there won't be much trouble with mice."

"No, I dinna suppose there would," commented Bob, adding, "Ye ken, a cat like that wouldna' come amiss here. We've got four already, but they're sae fat an' weel fed, they're ower lazy tae hunt the rats, an', lord kens! we've mair than enough o' *them*. Would ye sell that cat? I'll gie ye twa half-croons for it."

Since the kindly pair had always refused payment for the considerable quantities of food I consumed, I felt that here was an opportunity to repay, in slight measure, a little of the debt that I owed them.

"You can have the cat for nothing, Bob!" I said; "I owe you something for all the meals I've eaten here, and, in any case, it would be of more use to you than me."

This point settled, we went to view the kitten where I had left it, at the back door. Jean filled a saucer with cream and brought it out. Bob opened the creel. There

was a scrape of claws on basket-work, a blur of racing, yellow legs, and the little cat was gone. That was the last I saw of him.

A year elapsed before I called at The Craigs again, and the farmer gave me the history of Ginger. That was the name given to the kitten. When the story was finished, I concluded that a cat which is three generations feral is wholly and irretrievably wild. This is Bob's tale; I have merely filled in one or two blanks to make it as complete as possible.

On the day following Ginger's arrival, the farmer found the slight remains of three Wyandotte chicks on the granary floor. At first he suspected rats. But a puff of falling dust from the roof caused him to glance upward. And there, crouched on a rafter, was the yellow kitten. The moment Ginger found the man's eyes on him, he leapt from the rafter to the wall-top and vanished through a ventilation hole.

Bob scratched his head in perplexity. He knew the culprit now. This was a bad start; the kitten was here to kill rats, not chickens. Ginger would have to be closely watched, and his hunting activities carefully directed.

A week later, when next the farmer saw the cat, he was coming from beneath the threshing-mill with a rat in his mouth. This was better!

On seeing Bob, Ginger dropped his burden, and in three jumps reached the top of the mill. From there he sprang to the rafters, then leapt through an open skylight on to the roof, and away. The movements of the kitten were so beautifully calculated and executed that the farmer gazed in admiration and surprise. Stooping, he picked up the deceased rodent.

Outside, he met his wife and held up the rat for inspection.

"See, Jean," he exclaimed, "Ginger got this! "

"Look here, Bob," said Jean, "ye'll juist hae tae get rid o' that deil o' a cat! He's killed auld Biddy, an' her chicks would hae been hatched the morn! "

Bob dropped the rat and gazed blankly at his wife. The news took his breath away. Biddy was a nondescript old hen whose semi-permanent broodiness was her only asset. She had reared scores of chicks in her time. Having been here so long, she was more an institution than a fowl. Everyone had a soft spot in his heart for Biddy.

Into the farmer's mind came bitter thoughts concerning Ginger. He then recalled that ten of the eggs in the old hen's previous sitting had been destroyed by rats. Bob, in a very uncertain state of mind, did not know what to do. In the end, however, he decided to allow the kitten one more chance.

As the weeks went by, chicks still disappeared, and dead rats were picked up at frequent intervals. Because of this, the farmer continued in a disturbed frame of mind. He tried to convince himself that rats were the culprits where the chicks were concerned. But he found that he could not deceive himself. At the back of his mind, he knew well enough that the yellow kit was the offender. And he wondered whether the loss of the chicks was a high price to pay for the destruction of the rats. It certainly seemed to be. If he could have laid hands on the cat, he would have got rid of it. But no one ever saw Ginger now. He apparently lay in hiding during the day, then went a-roving when the shadows fell to hide his silent passing.

Earlier in the year, a pair of tawny owls had taken up residence in a tree close to the farmyard. Knowing their useful method of dealing with vermin, the farmer was extremely pleased to learn of the birds' arrival. He issued the order that no one must molest them, and did everything possible to encourage them to remain.

A quartette of downy owlets had appeared in the tree about the same time as the yellow kit arrived. These little creatures thrived amazingly and, at last, were fledged. It was a calm, starry night when first they used their wings and left the tree. One by one they flapped down to alight on the stacks. From there they flew to a rusty old mowing-machine, and perched together to be fed. The parent birds

flitted silently here and there like great brown leaves. They searched for mice and beetles.

Then a dim thing in tawny fur raced up the mower-shaft and lashed rapier hooks at the little owls. One of them emitted a startled yelp and flapped awkwardly up to land on the engine-house roof. Beneath the mower, low growls, menacing in their intensity, told of a hunter at work on his kill. One of the old birds now came sailing round the stack on slanting wings. It hovered for a moment, weighing the situation, then darted like an arrow beneath the mower. A long yellow leg flashed swiftly across its face to leave a featherless furrow. The owl uttered a sharp squawk and jerked up, but suddenly darted down again with great talons extended.

The kitten did not linger; he bolted under the engine-house door, through the driving-shaft hole in the wall, and from there into the mill.

When the three dead owlets were brought to him, Bob decided that Ginger had done enough harm.

"Hang that brute o' a cat!" he said. "We nicht as weel hae a tiger gaen aboot. He'll be killin' the cattle afore lang. I'll put a stop tae this!"

Five rabbit traps were taken from a hook. One was set in the stable, one in the granary ventilator, one beside the late Biddy's nest, and the remaining two in the stackyard.

Half an hour before dawn, next morning, the old she-owl was fast in a stackyard trap. Half a minute later, Ginger found the owl and slew her where she stood.

When Bob went round the traps and found the dead owl, he was furious. Throwing down the stick he carried, he strode, fuming, to the house. He pulled his gun from behind a cupboard, took two cartridges from a drawer and rammed them viciously into the breech. Jean looked at him in surprise. "What's he done, now, Bob?" she asked. There was no need to explain whom she referred to when she said "he."

"He's killed ane o' the auld owls," growled the man. "I'll get the yellow brute for that!"



But, at the end of an hour's fruitless search, the farmer had to admit defeat. Ginger, elusive as ever, was not in evidence. The gun was put away, still loaded for emergency, and Bob sat down to breakfast. No sooner was he seated, however, than the dairy-maid came running in to say that Ginger had just killed a Fantail pigeon on the granary roof.

Knocking a chair over in his haste, Bob seized his gun and dashed out. The cat was just crossing the ridge-pole when the man fired. There was a tinkle of broken slates sliding down the roof as the cat's tail went over out of sight. Bob ran round to the other side of the granary. The pigeon's body was lodged in the gutter pipe, but Ginger had vanished. And nobody saw him again for months.

The farmer was positive that some of the pellets had hit the mark. And he was equally positive that if the wounds did not prove fatal, Ginger would be more elusive than ever.

Later, although the kit was never seen, Bob felt certain that it was still about the farm. When he went round the buildings at night, just before retiring, the hairs on the nape of his neck would rise, and his scalp tingle now and again at some quiet corner. Yet the lamp failed to reveal the burning, amber eyes that he felt certain were glaring upon him.

Eventually, when everyone but Bob was convinced that Ginger had died, one of the farmyard cats, a soft, milk-loving Tom, was discovered dying at the door. Its skin was slashed to ribbons. Bob experienced a feeling akin to relief. His conviction was well founded, for the killing was undoubtedly the wild-cat's work—or play.

Jean now became genuinely afraid. The yellow kitten had grown rapidly, and might be dangerous if accidentally cornered. But an unexpected turn of events deflected the general interest from the killer for a short time. When the first fall of snow occurred in December, the neighbouring farm, Balmyle, was burned to the ground. The well-

filled stackyard was reduced to a desolation of fluffy, smoking ash. Immediately the fire broke out, the Balmyle rats flocked from all points to congregate about their leader. Only on occasions of dire emergency is a leader's service required. Then his power is absolute; and, seldom, indeed, is the trust misplaced. The great old rat went through the farmyard with a horde of others at his heels. He led them across a lane, then over a mile of snow-covered fields to—The Craigs.

Three pairs of eyes saw the migrants come. Two tawny owls waited silently in a tree; and, on the sill of a granary window, a long, yellow form glared at the slowly moving dark patch out on the snow. As the rat-pack approached, the cat passed in through the window, then went down through the mill and crouched behind the door that led from the stackyard to the barn.

When the owls swooped together from the tree, the rodents dashed frantically in all directions. Seven of them passed under the guarded door, and every one died behind it. Between them, the birds accounted for nineteen, then returned to the tree to rest. Standing motionless there, gazing silently down, they saw three more dark forms detach themselves from a hedge to scurry towards the stacks. With a whoop, the owls dived, and in ten seconds their score stood at twenty-two.

Again the birds perched and waited. Presently, seven more dark forms left the shade of the hedge, and the owls swooped as before. There came two squeaks of alarm, a wild flapping of wings, and the birds returned hurriedly to their perch. Then each of those seven stoats spat out a tuft of owl feathers, and continued to follow the trail of the rats. In a few seconds they disappeared in the stacks.

Next day, a farm-hand from Balmyle called to tell Bob Ross about the fire, and to ask if shelter could be provided for the rescued cattle. The stock was to be distributed in the adjacent farms until other arrangements had been made. Bob, of course, said he would be glad to help in any way possible.

As the messenger was about to leave, he remarked that he had seen the tracks of an army of rats, and that, as far as he could see, they ended at The Craigs. The information alarmed the farmer; he knew the havoc that might be wrought in a stack by a horde of hungry rats. Thanking the man, Bob hurried round to the stackyard, and found rat footprints everywhere in the snow. He discovered twenty carcasses also, and in his heart he thanked the owls. The cattleman's boy removed Ginger's seven before Bob saw them, and weeks elapsed before he heard of this.

After the Balmyle cattle had arrived and been fed, the farmer called one of his ploughmen, and together they went rat-hunting in the stackyard. Old Glen and Quirk, the collies, accompanied the men. A ferret was put down, and it promptly disappeared among the straw. From three stacks, forty-seven rats were ousted and killed; the collies catching most of them.

Later, the ferret was put into a fourth stack, and that was the last they ever saw of it. After waiting for an hour, Bob concluded that the lithe creature had found a tunnel leading away underground, and, wandering along it, had become lost. He did not know, until the body of the ferret was found when threshing was in progress, that there were seven stoats in that stack to meet it. A ferret will bolt one stoat, two, or, perhaps, three, but to attack seven in a farmyard *cul-de-sac* means death, violent and horrible.

The whole of the following day was devoted to rat-hunting. In the afternoon, the men commenced operations in the stable. They used a ferret which had been borrowed from the gamekeeper. The willing little creature was pushed into a hole in one of the stalls, then the men stood back with the dogs, awaiting events.

Silence reigned for a time until a mare in a loose-box along at the end gave a snort of alarm and banged her heels against the wall. There came a low, menacing snarl, a hateful sound, followed by a long squeal and a vicious growl. The dogs barked and got in his way as Bob dashed towards the loose-box. He flung the door open, looked in,

then yelled, "Oh! Ye slinkin' yellow deevil!" His stick hissed through the air as he let it fly with all his might into the corner. Ginger dodged the missile, sprang lightly to the hay-rack, poised a moment to throw a look of concentrated hate at the man, then leapt upward through the feed-hole into the loft.

Men and dogs rushed pell-mell towards the stairway giving access to the loft. The place was searched from end to end, in vain. The tawny will-o'-the-wisp was lost again. Under the loose-box trough, in the darkness, the ferret lay stretched in the unsuspected lair of the cat. It was bitten through the neck, and was quite dead.

Soon afterwards, matters came to a head when Jean, greatly distressed, announced one morning that her cherished pen of ten prize Aylesbury ducks had been wiped out in the night. There and then, Bob vowed that he would do no more work until the outlaw cat was finally and irrevocably dead.

In justice to Ginger, it must here be said that he had no hand in the slaughter of the ducks. As the keeper pointed out later on, had the angry farmer taken time to examine the ducks' injuries more closely, he would have found that stoats had done the deed.

However, immediately his wife's announcement had been made, Bob wrote a note to the vet., who was calling to dress burns sustained by the Balmyle cattle, requesting that he should bring some prussic acid along with him. Doped bait would then be distributed at every point where the cat would be likely to find it. That this measure would ultimately bring about Ginger's end, there was little doubt. The poisoned bait, however, was never used.

Soon after midnight, when an almost deathly silence reigned in the farm buildings, a scurry and squeak came from inside the granary walls. A pointed head with long grey whiskers poked out of a hole, then a rat emerged. It looked quickly around the dim, moon-lit granary, then bolted along the floor and through a cat-hole in a partition.

Presently, a pair of fiery pin-points appeared at the hole

the rat had left. A moment later, another pair shone beside the first, and two stoats emerged—thin, slinky dealers in death. Across the floor they flickered and through the cat-hole. Two more of the russet hunters appeared. They stood for an instant with their tails and little flat heads held high, then they went leaping after the others.

The rat had gone to "earth" in a pile of sacks, but the swift little hounds of the blood-soaked highways quickly rooted it out. Terror-stricken, and with its tail sticking out behind as stiff as wire, the rat scampered towards the mill. But it slithered, stiff-legged, to a stop when down from the gloom of the dusty-webbed rafters fell a long, tawny cat. With a soft thud the outlaw hit the floor six inches from that big rat's nose. The rodent, with a queer whining squeak of fear, turned to bolt—and came face to face with four hungry stoats in a line. The poor creature, normally resourceful, squealed aloud in panic.

The stoats began to close in on the rat, but a harsh growl came rumbling from Ginger's throat and stopped them. They chattered angrily; then one of them uttered a high-pitched chirring note: the hunter's call to arms. A few moments passed in tense silence; the pounding of the rat's heart could almost be heard. There came a rustle of flying straw in the mill, then out leapt two more stoats, their tails up—danger sign—and their eyes glaring murder. As they came bouncing over the floor, a chatter and faint scraping was heard somewhere in the darkness below. A rattle of loose plaster in the wall announced the arrival of the seventh stoat. The others saw his moonlit eyes in a corner, then he came with a rush.

The gaunt, yellow kitten had not yet moved. Hunched, with muscles tensed for instant action, he glared over the shivering rat at the murderous pack beyond. He knew, instinctively, that danger confronted him, but to Ginger this was nothing unusual.

The rat moved an inch; the stoats jerked up, and the cat uttered a vicious snarl. At the sound of it, the white-vested killers slid back on their haunches, legs wide-spread,

and chirred their challenge. Suddenly, after a quick glance to either side, the rat bolted. The cat drew back, then lunged into the air. In one magnificent leap he overtook the flying rat, then clenched his teeth through its squirming back and killed it. And the stoats, like swiftly blown leaves, streamed upon the stooping cat. One, a dog stoat, choking with rage, clenched his needle-sharp fangs in Ginger's lower jaw. The outlaw clasped his writhing assailant between his forepaws and rolled over on his back. He brought his hind-paw forward, placed it firmly on the white chest before him, extended his keen, curving hooks and gave a mighty thrust. The creature in his grasp was flayed from end to end: completely disembowelled.

The other stoats now clung and bit all over the snarling cat. Two had fastened like leeches, with locked tusks behind his ears. The stoat knows where the life-stream flows at flood. One little fiend, clinging to his shoulder, Ginger bit through the stomach. It rolled aside, curled up with its forepaws crossed, coughed and died.

The stoat at the cat's right ear now found with his teeth the well he sought. A thin stream of blood spurted in its face, soaking and staining its white fur when it trickled down its front. Straining in agony, the cat strove wildly to claw the tenacious little brute from his neck. In desperation he closed his fangs on its hindquarters and chewed. The stoat was forced to release its hold. Its haunches were pulverized. Ginger bit clean through its chest, then let it go. It died quickly and quietly.

One after another the stoats were killed until only one remained. It had fastened on the cat's haunch at the beginning and stuck there. Ginger's teeth broke its back, then he dropped it. The creature dragged itself away, and fell through a trap-door. But Ginger did not see it go. He stood in the middle of the floor, with head drooping. He felt cold and very sick. He tried to walk to the hay-pile, but his legs did not last the distance. Exhausted, he stretched on his side to rest. A faint mew he uttered—the mew of a kitten. In slow pulses, the blood welled from

the punctures in his neck. Hayseeds floated, circling on a crimson pool. And in a very little while, Ginger, friendless outcast, fighting feral-cat, shuddered once and gave a great gasp—that was all.

“An’ we found him lyin’ there in the mornin’,” concluded Bob. “Somehow or ither, we felt sorry for the puir little beast. He was awfu’ young!”

“Yes, Bob,” I said, “I know how you feel. He was a great little cat—and a bonny fighter, aye, from the moment he first opened his eyes till the moment when he last closed them!”

Personally, I felt immensely proud of Ginger.

## The Cat that knew Hell

D. MANNERS-SUTTON

THE CAT LIVED in the Rue de Lambre. The Rue de Lambre runs from the Boulevard Montparnasse to the Rue Edgar Quinet on the left bank of the Seine. It is a long narrow street for the most part, fenced on either side by tall grey houses, but nearing the Rue Edgar Quinet it widens out to almost boulevard width, and is not fenced about by houses, but by *boutiques* and *boulangeries* and pavement *cafés* with blue and orange painted chairs. The roadway itself is used as an open-air market, and there you can buy cauliflowers, cabbages, cream cheeses, *légume cuits*, and *escargots* (four for a franc) in the snail season. But frogs you cannot buy, for nowadays even on the left bank of the Seine frogs are considered an unnecessary luxury.

This market-place is the rendezvous in the morning hours of housewives and *bonnes*, who feel the cabbage hearts with the same carefulness that a doctor sounds his patients; in the afternoon it is given over to idle stragglers who dally at the stalls and buy nothing; and after dusk, when the acetylene gas lamps on the stalls are lit and spurt up like little flames of Hell, students from Jardine's Art School in the Rue de Dragon or George's Boxing Academy wander through it arm-in-arm, sometimes singing with boisterous good humour, sometimes soberly solemn, according to whether they are coming home from spending their money, or whether it is still burning a hole in the pockets of their velveteen *pantalons*.

But at all times, from dawn to dusk and dawn again, it was the home of the cat. The cat had no name—no particular name (he had been called many in his day, some that couldn't very well be mentioned here), but the stallholders in the market-place of the Rue de Lambre referred to him (above their breath) as *ce chat-là*, to distinguish



him perhaps from other cats of good disposition and moral behaviour, who were all well and nicely named. What they called him *sotto voce*, as we have said before, cannot be told in a land rife with civilization and censorship. But it was nothing good, for he was a thoroughly wicked cat; every stall-holder would have no hesitation in saying that much at least about him, from Madame Bouchier, who sat behind her snail barrel, like a modern Madame Defarge, knitting endless and unknown garments out of pink wool (*parbleu!* how that wool pleased the cat when he felt his claws entangled in it), to crook-backed old Anton, who innumerable times each day patiently set the herbs in order upon his *petite voiture*, after the cat, with a tail like a kite in the wind, had sought to dig his way through them to the South Pacific Islands. No, they knew him too well, those stall-holders, to have anything but evil to say of him, for their end of the Rue de Lambre was the cat's particular domain. It was there he scratched, bit, tore, and raved to the contentment of his murderous heart. It was there he was all things just as he chose, a bat, a bird, a fox, a panther, a snake in the grass, and sometimes, when his thoughts were long, quiet, and bent upon strategy, a little black lamb of God. But it was only a stranger to the Rue who was ever deceived by this last-named mood, and took liberties with it. When the cat sat bolt upright, with his two front legs as straight as pillars, and stared away into the beyond with unwinking yellow eyes, a stranger to the Rue de Lambre might venture to lean down to give a conciliatory pat; but an *habitué* of the Rue would walk on the other side of the street and even then hurry along as if bent upon some particular business. Those of the Rue knew of old what came of the cat's contemplation of divine things.

The cat had come a year ago to the Rue, from whence no one knew. It may have been from the wild wet woods of some faery land ten thousand miles from Paris; it may have been merely from the next *rue*; but he came, a down-trodden, lean-sided, scrawny black thing, lean enough even

to be pitied by the stall-holders, who fed him upon the odd left-over bits of their produce that would otherwise have gone to swell the refuse in the dust-cart. And he stayed to bite the hands that had fed him, to become the terror of the Rue, and the only Socialist in Paris. He shared his spoils with everyone.

When he played his enchanted and socialistic game, the cream cheeses of Madame Dupont were spattered and scattered upon Monsieur Maigrot's neatly piled tiers of oranges, the *escargots* of Madame Bouchier found a resting-place amongst the cauliflowers of Madame Tiron. The neat little red joints of meat that decorated the booth of M. le Boucher were sometimes found on the *trottoir*, in the *marron chaud* barrel, and sometimes they were never found at all. It was amazing the amount of distributing that one cat who bit, flew, raved, and ran could do in the space of time that the stall-holders were mobilising themselves into an army of defence and attack.

If there had been any Black Marias in Paris, with uniformed officials walking behind trying to look like scholarly professors out for research work with their butterfly nets, undoubtedly the cat would have passed beyond the ken of all in the first few months of his socialistic, piratical and freebooting existence, but Paris, the city of supreme tolerance, allows even a cat the undisputed right to live how and where it pleases, provided, of course, that it in turn lets live (with the exception in this instance of rats, mice, and cockroaches); but that was something the cat of the Rue de Lambre refused to do. He was a wicked freebooter who joyed in destruction. His career in the Rue de Lambre was one long orgy of depredation.

He was even complained about to the police. But the police, after losing much of their official dignity as well as several silver buttons in an encounter with him, pigeon-holed all such complaints, and the cat went on his own marauding, primitive, wild-west-wood way undisturbed, at least by blue-caped officialdom.

And this day of which we are now about to speak, had

been one of the worst in the memory of the stall-holders in the market of the Rue de Lambre. From dawn till dusk the cat had harried them, upset their baskets, bitten their children, disturbed their stalls, scattered their goods: he had mocked, challenged, hurtled, clawed, and now in quiet meditative triumph he sat upon the *trottoir* as stolid and as apparently immovable as the Chinese Buddha in the window of old Monsieur Burgoyne's Antique Shop at the corner of the Rue. There he sat—solemn, sedate, immutable—planning his *coup d'état*. *Ce chat-là* with an invisible paw to his nose.

The Rue de Lambre was darkening rapidly and the little spurting flames of Hell were springing into existence in every booth. The cat loved these flames; they brought the seven devils that dwelt in his heart into quick action. When they showed their little daffodil gleams in the darkness, his body grew sleek and his muscles taut, his tail quivered with excitement, and his eyes shone with a fire that rivalled the little spurting flames themselves. The hour when the lamps of Hell were lit was his—the destruction of the daytime was just mere diversion to get through an otherwise boring period, but when the misty dusk arrived and the queer little yellow flames shot up and flared and flickered through air like white chiffon, that was his hour, and by the very pagan gods that made him, he used it to the best advantage.

By the lights of Hell the *poupée* stall looked delectable this night. From his position on the *trottoir* he could see the dress of the Spanish doll gleaming red and black; he imagined his claws in the lace of her head-dress, and his soft little paws curled with delight on the pavement at the anticipation. But next to the *poupée*-stall old Anton, the herb man, crook-backed and lame, was bending over his *petite voiture*, gathering up his herbs for the night. His back, old and bent and feeble, was towards the cat. The cat, padding his paws softly up and down on the pavement, felt that the joy of biting and clawing at that bent old back would be more to his enjoyment than even the despoiling

of the *poupée* stall. He gauged the distance between himself and old Anton carefully; he had a nice discernment as to distance; he never once missed his object.

Meanwhile old Anton bound up his herbs into bundles—the thyme, the sage, and the large-leafed *cresson*—and packed them away carefully in his broken basket.

But before the cat had stretched himself to his full length in readiness for his spring, something happened in the Rue de Lambre, something that was destined to put off the assault upon the old herb man for all time. Something at least unforeseen and unpremeditated by the cat.

It is very seldom that a foreigner is seen in the Rue de Lambre, unless it is some student hurrying through with his *carte d'identité* to be stamped by the black-moustachioed *Commissair de Police*, who sits behind a counter up three dingy flights of stairs at No. 10—it is not a foreign quarter, and if ever any foreigner, other than the student kind, does appear in the Rue, it is usually quite by accident and through having left their *Guide des Arrondissements* at home.

And that is probably what happened when the American governess—flat-footed, spectacled, and entirely traditional—with her tiny girl charge, all pink coat and fluffy bonnet, descended upon the cat unawares. He first became aware of their presence by the unmistakable feeling of a finger poking at his side, and hearing a dulcet voice somewhere in vicinity of left ear saying urbanely: “Ni’ pussy.”

Now the cat had heard himself called many things in his day (most of them blue and sulphurous) in many different languages, but he had never yet heard himself referred to as anything even remotely resembling “Ni’ pussy.” He didn’t understand the tongue, but the tone was unmistakable.

Somewhat taken aback and his morale going to pieces for the moment, he looked up to see what the owner of the tiny sweet voice was like. He did not have to look far; the pink-coated fluffy thing was barely three, and therefore almost on a level with himself.

"Come on, baby," said the American governess impatiently. "We seem to have got into the wrong street."

Baby did not move; she continued to poke with a podgy finger at the cat's middle regions. She might conceivably have no knowledge of nor any interest in wrong streets, but she certainly knew the right cat when she saw him, and she had no intention of leaving him just then.

The governess, looking down from her church-steeple height, said: "Scct shu, scct!" making funny little clicking noises from between her teeth.

Ah! the cat knew those sounds—they were old in the language of cats. It would rejoice him exceedingly to spring straight at the church-steeple's white throat and claw there until he made the red blood flow. He stretched himself to do it, ignoring with apparent contempt the pink baby at his side. But the pink baby refused to be ignored; with two podgy hands she grasped firmly at the lengthening middle of the cat and held on.

"Come on, baby," said the governess, totally unaware of her imminent danger, "let the dirty mongrel cat be."

But baby was not willing to "come on" without the cat; she tried to lift him, valiantly struggling with his weight, and finally managed to achieve a kind of desperate heave about his middle, muttering meanwhile something about taking the "ni' pussy" home.

"He's not a nice cat," said the church-steeple, bending down and trying to disengage the two. But the pink-coated baby only clung the tighter, and the cat, now feeling the strain upon his middle somewhat wearisome, took it out of somebody by biting the hand that sought to free him.

"There now," said the governess, "he has bitten me. Put him down this instant and come home."

The pink-coated baby grew more stubborn. It seemed that in the space of a very few minutes she had become definitely joined in some way to the cat, like a Siamese twin. They rolled over into the mud of the gutter together.

The governess appealed to the stall-holders. "Whose

cat is it? Won't some of you come and take it away?" she asked them in a language which she considered to be French.

M. le Boucher being the nearest stall-holder, answered her first. With a low bow he assured her that the cat belonged to no one unless it was to the devil himself. Madame Tiron, next to M. le Boucher, spoke out next. Shrugging her ample shawl-clad shoulders, she asked: "Why did not Mam'zelle take the cat away herself?" Madame Bouchier, still knitting imperturbably, and raising her voice a little so that all might hear, added that as far as she was concerned the pink-coated *bébé* could have the cat and welcome—very welcome.

The governess sighed; plainly there was no help forthcoming from that quarter.

Now, a taxi passing in the Rue de Lambre at that moment, yes, even in such a street as the Rue de Lambre you will always find a taxi when you want one (and sometimes when you don't) for like the poor relation they are always with us—in Paris, and the driver of this taxi seeing the black cat and the fluffy pink ball of a thing rolling over and over in the mud of the gutter, with the church-steeple of a governess bending over and trying to separate them and getting the worst of the encounter every time, slowed down his machine insinuatingly. Here, he thought, would be *un bon pourboire*, taking in at a glance the horn-rimmed spectacles, the sensible shoes, and the pink expensive baby-coat getting all muddy, and summing up the situation with the delightful accuracy of his kind.

And after waiting a few seconds he proved himself to be right. The governess, seeing that she could not separate the two without serious and permanent injury to her hands, picked them both up bodily and deposited them in the taxi.

"Two hundred Avenue d'Iéna," she told the driver in a voice of acute despair.

He nodded; she need have told him only the number.

"I'll tell your father when we get home," said the gover-

ness severely to the baby thing. "I don't know what he will say."

But the pink baby, now quite definitely the pink and mud-splashed baby, was defiant. What did the telling of a father count for as against the precious possession of the right cat?

The right cat, sitting not at all at his ease on the cushioned seat of the taxi, still with that tight clasp about his middle, for once was at a loss what to do. Bitter resentment was in his heart; he knew the jolting thing he was in too well—it and its kind had been the only things that had ever escaped in his joyous rushes of destruction. They had always been the quicker, and left him bruised and revengeful on the roadside. And now here he was sitting inside one of these detested vehicles on wheels that could run quicker than he could, his liberty taken from him, cooped up, restrained, he, the freebooter, the marauder, the very Henry Morgan of cats!

He turned to look at the infinitely contemptible thing that had put these bonds upon his liberty; he glared at the baby thing beside him with bitter resentful eyes. She met his gaze calmly; then something passed between them, a long look from her baby blue eyes to his untamed yellow ones, which had in it something a little curious, soothing, secret, and perhaps divine.

The cat sat more at his ease on the leather-upholstered seat, the strain upon his middle was relaxed a little. He was tired; he allowed himself to loll. The baby said, "Ni' pussy," and poked at his fur. He bridled, prinked, preened, and purred, as if to show what he very well could be if he chose. The soft podgy hand patted its approval.

The governess, sitting bolt upright on the taxi seat, said, "Well, I wash my hands of the whole thing," in a loud voice which she wished some blue-caped *gendarme*, or at least someone who had some authority (as she seemed to have lost all hers), might hear.

The taxi-driver, in deep contemplation of the largeness of the *pourboire* to come, missed a pavement corner by

the eighth of an inch, a pedestrian by another, and a policeman by the length of his baton. It was in this manner the right cat, no longer the son of Ishmael, with the world's hand against him, was brought to a happy and a comfortable home.

Fathers are sometimes easier to deal with than governesses (who, after all, are paid to be severe), and mothers, too, can sometimes be wound round a podgy finger and made to think that the right place for the right cat is the rouge satin *pouffe* before the large open fireplace in the salon, where a wood-fire is kept burning all winter because it looks rich and extravagant to have a fire when the apartment is so well heated already.

And cream in a large saucer in front of a fire and fried chicken bones on a kitchen hearth can bring deterioration to a cat quicker than anything yet discovered. The right cat waxed fat and the right cat grew lazy. The one-time blade of a cat became dull and cumbersome of movement; his wicked gnome-slit amber eyes were glazed with over-sleep. His sides bulged with gorged chicken and lapped cream. He was to all intents and purposes a nice cat; even the church-steeple was constrained to say so whilst bending down from her great height to pat his head. He did not bite her now.

True, he fought a little sometimes. After making the acquaintance of the cat of the *concierge*, a small, well-mannered lady cat, with mincing tabby ways, the *rouge chat* who lived in the attic apartments and had once been beau to her, went about minus an ear and with one eye permanently closed. The next-door cat also suffered much as to ear and fur; but those were gentlemanly encounters to what had happened sometimes at midnight in the Rue de Lambre.

But there are times when into the cat's lethargic cream-bemuddled brain creeps a wistful memory of the glory that is past. It is mostly at dusk that this memory comes, when the neat capped and aproned maid enters the salon to draw the heavy chenille curtains across the long French



windows, and for one instant the street lights blaze out through the night mist before they are shut out from view by red chenille. It is then that the cat remembers the Rue de Lambre. He sees once again the stalls, hears the high-pitched voices of the stall-holders raised in strident fury against him, sees the little spurting flames of Hell, and feels his claws lengthening, his muscles growing taut, and the wild madcap call to murderous action surging through his blood.

Ah, the intoxication of scattering Madame Tiron's cabbages to the four winds! The joy of digging deep in Madame Bouchier's snail barrel! The delight of seeing the girl from the *boulangerie* sprawling upon the *trottoir* on top of her basket of *petits pains*! The fiendish anticipation of teeth in white flesh, of claws deep in thick wool or flimsy cotton! Ah, the glory of those past hours when the yellow goblin lights danced in the mist-veiled darkness, when it was spit, scratch, swear, out with everything, down with everyone and long live the devil!

And the cat, with his soft paws padding down his bed on the most delicate and extravagant of all the satin *pouffes*, for yet more slumber, thinks, as sometimes humans think who have repented of their sins and are now on the side of the haloed angels, that after all Hell had its points.

♦

## *The Cat*

MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

THE SNOW WAS falling, and the Cat's fur was stiffly pointed with it, but he was imperturbable. He sat crouched, ready for the death-spring, as he had sat for hours. It was night—but that made no difference—all times were as one to the Cat when he was in wait for prey. Then, too, he was under no constraint of human will, for he was living alone that winter. Nowhere in the world was any voice calling him; on no hearth was there a waiting dish. He was quite free except for his own desires, which tyrannized over him when unsatisfied as now. The Cat was very hungry—almost famished, in fact. For days the weather had been very bitter, and all the feeblere wild things which were his prey by inheritance, the born serfs to his family, had kept, for the most part, in their burrows and nests, and the Cat's long hunt had availed him nothing. But he waited with the inconceivable patience and persistency of his race; besides, he was certain. The Cat was a creature of absolute convictions, and his faith in his deductions never wavered. The rabbit had gone in there between those low-hung pine boughs. Now her little doorway had before it a shaggy curtain of snow, but in there she was. The Cat had seen her enter, so like a swift grey shadow that even his sharp and practised eyes had glanced back for the substance following, and then she was gone. So he sat down and waited, and he waited still in the white night, listening angrily to the north wind starting in the upper heights of the mountains with distant screams, then swelling into an awful crescendo of rage, and swooping down with furious white wings of snow like a flock of fierce eagles into the valleys and ravines. The Cat was on the side of a mountain, on a wooded terrace. Above him a few feet away towered the rock ascent as steep as

the wall of a cathedral. The Cat had never climbed it—trees were the ladders to his heights of life. He had often looked with wonder at the rock, and miauled bitterly and resentfully as man does in the face of a forbidding Providence. At his left was the sheer precipice. Behind him, with a short stretch of woody growth between, was the frozen perpendicular fall of a mountain stream. Before him was the way to his home. When the rabbit came out she was trapped; her little cloven feet could not scale such unbroken steeps. So the Cat waited. The place in which he was looked like a maelstrom of the wood. The tangle of trees and bushes clinging to the mountain-side with a stern clutch of roots, the prostrate trunks and branches, the vines embracing everything with strong knots and coils of growth, had a curious effect, as of things which had whirled for ages in a current of raging water, only it was not water, but wind, which had disposed everything in circling lines of yielding to its fiercest point of onset. And now over all this whirl of wood and rock and dead trunks and branches and vines descended the snow. It blew down like smoke over the rock-crest above; it stood in a gyrating column like some death-wraith of nature, on the level, then it broke over the edge of the precipice, and the Cat cowered before the fierce backward set of it. It was as if ice needles pricked his skin through his beautiful thick fur, but he never faltered and never once cried. He had nothing to gain from crying, and everything to lose; the rabbit would hear him cry and know he was waiting.

It grew darker and darker, with a strange white smother, instead of the natural blackness of night. It was a night of storm and death superadded to the night of nature. The mountains were all hidden, wrapped about, overawed, and tumultuously overborne by it, but in the midst of it waited, quite unconquered, this little, unswerving, living patience and power under a little coat of grey fur.

A fiercer blast swept over the rock, spun on one mighty foot of whirlwind athwart the level, then was over the precipice.

Then the Cat saw two eyes luminous with terror, frantic with the impulse of flight, he saw a little, quivering, dilating nose, he saw two pointed ears, and he kept still, with every one of his fine nerves and muscles strained like wires. Then the rabbit was out—there was one long line of incarnate flight and terror—and the Cat had her.

Then the Cat went home, trailing his prey through the snow.

The Cat lived in the house which his master had built, as rudely as a child's block-house, but staunchly enough. The snow was heavy on the low slant of its roof, but it would not settle under it. The two windows and the door were made fast, but the Cat knew a way in. Up the pine tree behind the house he scuttled, though it was hard work with his heavy rabbit, and was in his little window under the eaves, then down through the trap to the room below, and on his master's bed with a spring and a great cry of triumph, rabbit and all. But his master was not there; he had been gone since early fall and it was now February. He would not return until spring, for he was an old man, and the cruel cold of the mountains clutched at his vitals like a panther, and he had gone to the village to winter. The Cat had known for a long time that his master was gone, but his reasoning was always sequential and circuitous; always for him what had been would be, and the more easily for his marvellous waiting powers, so he always came home expecting to find his master.

When he saw that he was still gone, he dragged the rabbit off the rude couch which was the bed to the floor, put one little paw on the carcass to keep it steady, and began gnawing with head to one side to bring his strongest teeth to bear.

It was darker in the house than it had been in the wood, and the cold was as deadly, though not so fierce. If the Cat had not received his fur coat unquestioningly of Providence, he would have been thankful that he had it. It was a mottled grey, white on the face and breast, and thick as fur could grow.

The wind drove the snow on the windows with such force that it rattled like sleet, and the house trembled a little. Then all at once the Cat heard a noise, and stopped gnawing his rabbit and listened, his shining green eyes fixed upon a window. Then he heard a hoarse shout, a halloo of despair and entreaty; but he knew it was not his master come home, and he waited, one paw still on the rabbit. Then the halloo came again, and then the Cat answered. He said all that was essential quite plainly to his own comprehension. There was in his cry of response inquiry, information, warning, terror, and finally, the offer of comradeship; but the man outside did not hear him, because of the howling of the storm.

Then there was a great battering pound at the door, then another, and another. The Cat dragged his rabbit under the bed. The blows came thicker and faster. It was a weak arm which gave them, but it was nerved by desperation. Finally the lock yielded, and the stranger came in. Then the Cat, peering from under the bed, blinked with a sudden light, and his green eyes narrowed. The stranger struck a match and looked about. The Cat saw a face wild and blue with hunger and cold, and a man who looked poorer and older than his poor old master, who was an outcast among men for his poverty and lowly mystery of antecedents; and he heard a muttered, unintelligible voicing of distress from the harsh, piteous mouth. There was in it both profanity and prayer, but the Cat knew nothing of that.

The stranger braced the door which he had forced, got some wood from the stock in the corner, and kindled a fire in the old stove as quickly as his half-frozen hands would allow. He shook so pitiaibly as he worked that the Cat under the bed felt the tremor of it. Then the man, who was small and feeble and marked with the scars of suffering which he had pulled down upon his own head, sat down in one of the old chairs and crouched over the fire as if it were the one love and desire of his soul, holding out his yellow hands like yellow claws, and he groaned.

The Cat came out from under the bed and leaped up on his lap with the rabbit. The man gave a great shout and start of terror, and sprang, and the Cat slid clawing to the floor, and the rabbit fell inertly, and the man leaned, gasping with fright, and ghastly, against the wall. The Cat grabbed the rabbit by the slack of its neck and dragged it to the man's feet. Then he raised his shrill, insistent cry, he arched his back high, his tail was a splendid waving plume. He rubbed against the man's feet, which were bursting out of their torn shoes.

The man pushed the Cat away, gently enough, and began searching about the little cabin. He even climbed painfully the ladder to the loft, lit a match, and peered up in the darkness with straining eyes. He feared lest there might be a man, since there was a cat. His experience with men had not been pleasant, and neither had the experience of men been pleasant with him. He was an old wandering Ishmael among his kind; he had stumbled upon the house of a brother, and the brother was not at home, and he was glad.

He returned to the Cat, and stooped stiffly and stroked his back, which the animal arched like the spring of a bow.

Then he took up the rabbit and looked at it eagerly by the firelight. His jaws worked. He could almost have devoured it raw. He fumbled—the Cat close at his heels—around some rude shelves and a table, and found with a grunt of self-gratulation, a lamp with oil in it. That he lighted; then he found a frying-pan and a knife, and skinned the rabbit, and prepared it for cooking, the Cat always at his feet.

When the odour of the cooking flesh filled the cabin, both the man and the Cat looked wolfish. The man turned the rabbit with one hand and stooped to pat the Cat with the other. The Cat thought him a fine man. He loved him with all his heart, though he had known him such a short time, and though the man had a face both pitiful and sharply set at variance with the best of things.

It was a face with the grimy grizzle of age upon it, with

fever hollows in the cheeks, and the memories of wrong in the dim eyes, but the Cat accepted the man unquestioningly and loved him. When the rabbit was half cooked, neither the man nor the Cat could wait any longer. The man took it from the fire, divided it exactly in halves, gave the Cat one, and took the other himself. Then they ate.

Then the man blew out the light, called the Cat to him, got on the bed, drew up the ragged coverings, and fell asleep with the Cat in his bosom.

The man was the Cat's guest all the rest of the winter, and winter is long in the mountains. The rightful owner of the little hut did not return until May. All that time the Cat toiled hard, and he grew rather thin himself, for he shared everything except mice with his guest; and sometimes game was wary, and the fruit of the patience of days was very little for two. The man was ill and weak, however, and unable to eat much, which was fortunate, since he could not hunt for himself. All day long he lay on the bed, or else sat crouched over the fire. It was a good thing that fire-wood was ready at hand for the picking up, not a stone's-throw from the door, for that he had to attend to himself.

The Cat foraged tirelessly. Sometimes he was gone for days together, and at first the man used to be terrified, thinking he would never return; then he would hear the familiar cry at the door, and stumble to his feet and let him in. Then the two would dine together, sharing equally; then the Cat would rest and purr, and finally sleep in the man's arms.

Towards spring the game grew plentiful; more wild little quarry were tempted out of their homes, in search of love as well as food. One day the Cat had luck—a rabbit, a partridge, and a mouse. He could not carry them all at once, but finally he had them together at the house door. Then he cried, but no one answered. All the mountain streams were loosened, and the air was full of the gurgle of many waters, occasionally pierced by a bird-whistle. The trees rustled with a new sound to the spring

wind; there was a flush of rose and gold-green on the breasting surface of a distant mountain seen through an opening in the wood. The tips of the bushes were swollen and glistening red, and now and then there was a flower; but the Cat had nothing to do with flowers. He stood beside his booty at the house door, and cried and cried with his insistent triumph and complaint and pleading, but no one came to let him in. Then the Cat left his little treasures at the door, and went around to the back of the house to the pine tree, and was up the trunk with a wild scramble, and in through his little window, and down through the trap to the room, and the man was gone.

The Cat cried again—that cry of the animal for human companionship which is one of the sad notes of the world; for he looked in all the corners; he sprang to the chair at the window and looked out; but no one came. The man was gone, and he never came again.

The Cat ate his mouse out on the turf beside the house; the rabbit and the partridge he carried painfully into the house, but the man did not come to share them. Finally, in the course of a day or two, he ate them up himself; then he slept a long time on the bed, and when he waked the man was not there.

Then the Cat went forth to his hunting-grounds again, and came home at night with a plump bird, reasoning with his tireless persistency in expectancy that the man would be there; and there was a light in the window, and when he cried his old master opened the door and let him in.

His master had strong comradeship with the Cat, but not affection. He never patted him like that gentler outcast, but he had a pride in him and an anxiety for his welfare, though he had left him alone all winter without scruple. He feared lest some misfortune might have come to the Cat, though he was so large of his kind, and a mighty hunter. Therefore, when he saw him at the door in all the glory of his glossy winter coat, his white breast and face shining like snow in the sun, his own face lit up with



welcome, and the Cat embraced his feet with his sinuous body vibrant with rejoicing purrs.

The Cat had his bird to himself, for his master had his own supper already cooking on the stove. After supper the Cat's master took his pipe, and sought a small store of tobacco which he had left in his hut over winter. He had thought often of it; that and the Cat seemed something to come home to in the spring. But the tobacco was gone; not a dust left. The man swore a little in a grim monotone, which made the profanity lose its customary effect. He had been, and was, a hard drinker; he had knocked about the world until the marks of its sharp corners were on his very soul, which was thereby calloused, until his very sensibility to loss was dulled. He was a very old man.

He searched for the tobacco with a sort of dull combativeness of persistency; then he stared with stupid wonder around the room. Suddenly many features struck him as being changed. Another stove-lid was broken; an old piece of carpet was tacked up over a window to keep out the cold; his fire-wood was gone. He looked and there was no oil left in his can. He looked at the coverings on his bed; he took them up, and again he made that strange remonstrant noise in his throat. Then he looked again for his tobacco.

Finally he gave it up. He sat down beside the fire, for May in the mountains is cold; he held his empty pipe in his mouth, his rough forehead knitted, and he and the Cat looked at each other across that impassable barrier of silence which has been set between man and beast from the creation of the world.

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## *The Cat of the Cane-Brake*

FREDERICK STUART GREENE

"SALLY! O-OH, SALLY! I'm a-goin' now." Jim Gantt pushed back the limp brim of his rusty felt hat and turned colourless eyes toward the cabin.

A young woman came from around the corner of the house. From each hand dangled a bunch of squawking chickens. She did not speak until she had reached the wagon.

"Now, Jim, you ain't a-goin' to let them fellers down in Andalushy git you inter no blind tiger, air you?" The question came in a hopeless drawl; hopeless, too, her look into the man's sallow face.

"I ain't teched a drop in more'n three months, had I?" Jim's answer was in a sullen key.

"No, Jim, you bin doin' right well lately." She tossed the chickens into the wagon, thoughtless of the hurt to their tied and twisted legs. "They're worth two bits apiece, that comes to two dollars, Jim. Don't you take a nickel less'n that."

Jim gave a listless pull at the cotton rope that served as reins.

"Git up thar, mule!" he called, and the wagon creaked off on wobbling wheels down the hot, dusty road.

The woman looked scornfully at the man's humped-over back for a full minute, turned and walked to the house, a hard smile at her mouth.

Sally Gantt gave no heed to her drab surroundings as she crossed the short stretch from road to cabin. All her twenty-two years had been spent in this far end of Alabama, where one dreary, unkempt clearing in the pinewoods is as dismal as the next. Comparisons which might add their fuel to her smouldering discontent were spared her. Yet, unconsciously, this bare, grassless country with its flat miles

of monotonous pine forest, its flatter miles of rank cane-brake, served to distill a bitter gall, poisoning all her thoughts.

The double cabin of Jim Gantt, its two rooms separated by a "dog-trot"—an open porch cut through the centre of the structure—was counted a thing of luxury by his scattered neighbours. Gantt had built it four years before, when he took up the land as his homestead, and Sally for his wife. The labour of building this cabin had apparently drained his stock of energy to the dregs. Beyond the necessary toil of planting a small patch of corn, a smaller one of sweet potatoes and fishing in the sluggish water of Pigeon Creek, he now did nothing. Sally tended the chickens, their one source of money, and gave intermittent attention to the half-dozen razor-back hogs, which, with the scrubby mule, comprised their toll of livestock.

As the woman mounted the hewn log that answered as a step to the dog-trot she stopped to listen. From the kitchen came a faint noise; a sound of crunching. Sally went on silent feet to the door. On the table, littered with unwashed dishes, a cat was gnawing at a fish head; a gaunt beast, its lean flanks covered with wiry fur, except where ragged scars left exposed the bare hide. Its strong jaws crushed through the thick skullbone of the fish as if it were an empty bird's egg.

Sally sprang to the stove and seized a pine knot.

"Dog-gone your yaller hide!" she screamed. "Git out of hyar!"

The cat wheeled with a start and faced the woman, its evil eyes glittering.

"Git, you yaller devil!" the woman screamed again.

The cat sprang sidewise to the floor. Sally sent the jagged piece of wood spinning through the air. It crashed against the far wall, missing the beast by an inch. The animal arched its huge body and held its ground.

"You varmint, I'll git you this time!" Sally stooped for another piece of wood. The cat darted through the door ahead of the flying missile.

"I'll kill you yit!" Sally shouted after it. "An' he kain't hinder me neither!"

She sat down heavily and wiped the sweat from her forehead.

It was several minutes before the woman rose from the chair and crossed the dog-trot to the sleeping-room. Throwing her faded sun-bonnet into a corner, she loosened her hair and began to brush it.

Sally Gantt was neither pretty nor handsome. But in a country peopled solely by pine-woods Crackers, her black hair and eyes, clear skin and white teeth, made her stand out. She was a woman, and young. To a man, also young, who for two years had seen no face unpainted with the sallow hue of chills and fever, no eyes except faded blue ones framed by white, straggling lashes, no sound teeth, and the unsound ones stained always by the snuff stick, she might easily appear alluring.

With feminine deftness Sally recoiled her hair. She took from a wooden peg a blue calico dress, its printed pattern as yet unbleached by the fierce suns. It gave her slender figure some touch of grace. From beneath the bed she drew a pair of heavy brogans; a shoe fashioned, doubtless, to match the listless nature of the people who most use them; slipping on or off without hindrance from lace or buckle. As a final touch, she fastened about her head a piece of blue ribbon, the band of cheap silk making the flash in her black eyes the brighter.

Sally left the house and started across the rubbish-littered yard. A short distance from the cabin she stopped to look about her.

"I'm dog-tired of it all," she said fiercely. "I hates the house. I hates the whole place, an' more'n all I hates Jim."

She turned, scowling, and walked between the rows of growing corn that reached to the edge of the clearing. Here began the pinewoods, the one saving touch nature has given to this land. Beneath the grateful shade she hastened her steps. The trees stood in endless disordered

ranks, rising straight and bare of branch until high aloft their spreading tops caught the sunlight.

A quarter of a mile brought her to the lowland. She went down the slight decline and stepped within the cane-brake. Here gloom closed about her, the thickly growing cane reached to twice her height. Above the cane the cypress spread its branches, draped with the sad, grey moss of the South. No sun's ray struggled through the rank foliage to lighten the sodden earth beneath. Sally picked her way slowly through the swamp, peering cautiously beyond each fallen log before venturing a further step. Crawfish scuttled backward from her path to slip down the mud chimneys of their homes. The black earth and decaying plants filled the hot, still air with noisome odours. Thousands of hidden insects sounded through the dank stretches their grating calls. Slimy water oozed from beneath the heavy soles of her brogans, green and purple bubbles were left in each footprint, bubbles with iridescent oily skins.

As she went around a sharp turn she was caught up and lifted clear from the ground in the arms of a young man—a boy of twenty or thereabout.

"Oh, Bob, you scairt me—you certainly air rough! "

Without words he kissed her again and again.

"Now, Bob, you quit! Ain't you had enough? "

"Could I ever have enough? Qh, Sally, I love you so! " The words trembled from the boy.

"You certainly ain't like none of 'em 'round hyar, Bob." There was some pride in Sally's drawling voice. "I never seed none of them menfolks act with gals like you does."

"There's no other girl like you to make them." Then holding her from him he went on fiercely. "You don't let any of them try it, do you? "

Sally smiled up into his glowing eyes.

"You knows I don't. They'd be-afeard of Jim."

The blood rushed to the boy's cheeks, his arms dropped to his side—he stood sobered.

"Sally, we can't go on this way any longer, that's why I asked you to come to the river today."

"What's a-goin' to stop us?" A frightened look crossed the woman's face.

"I'm going away."

She made a quick step toward him.

"You ain't lost your job on the new railroad?"

"No—come down to the boat where we can talk this over."

He helped her down the bank of the creek to a flat bottomed skiff, and seated her with a touch of courtesy in the stern before taking the cross seat facing her.

"No, I haven't lost my job," he began earnestly, "but my section of the road is about finished. They'll move me farther up the line in about a week."

She sat silent for a moment, her black eyes wide with question. He searched them for some sign of sorrow.

"What kin I do after you air gone?"

There was a hopeless note in her voice—it pleased the boy.

"That's the point—instead of letting them move me I'm going to move myself."

He paused that she might get the full meaning of his coming words.

"I'm going away from here tonight, and I'm going to take you away with me."

"No, no! I dasn't!" She shrank before his steady gaze.

He moved swiftly across to her—throwing his arms around her, he poured out his words.

"Yes! You will! You must! You love me, don't you?"

Sally nodded in helpless assent.

"Better than anything in this world?"

Again Sally nodded. The boy kissed her.

"Then listen. Tonight at twelve you come to the river—I'll be waiting for you at the edge of the swamp. We'll row down to Brewton; we can easily catch the 6.20 to Mobile, and, once there, we'll begin to live," he finished grandly.

"But I can't! Air you crazy? How kin I git away an' Jim right in the house?"

"I've thought of all that; you just let him see this." From beneath the seat he drew a bottle. "You know what he'll do to this—it's the strongest corn whiskey I could find."

"Oh, Bob. I'm ascairt to."

"Don't you love me?" His young eyes looked reproach.

Sally threw both arms about the boy's neck and drew his head down to her lips. Then she pushed him from her.

"Bob, is it so what the menfolks all say, that the railroad gives you a hundred dollars every month?"

He laughed. "Yes, you darling girl, and more. I get a hundred and a quarter, and I've been getting it for two years in this God-forsaken country, and nothing to spend it on. I've got over a thousand dollars saved up."

The woman's eyes widened. She kissed the boy on the mouth.

"They 'lows as how you're the smartest engineer on the road."

The boy's head was held high.

Sally made some mental calculations before she spoke again.

"Oh, Bob, I jes' can't. I'm ascairt to."

He caught her to him. A man of longer experience might have noted the sham in her reluctance.

"My darling, what are you afraid of?" he cried.

"What air we a-goin' to do after we gits to Mobile?"

"Oh, I've thought of everything—they're building a new line down in Texas—we'll go there. I'll get another job as resident engineer. I have my profession," he ended proudly.

"You might git tired, and want to git shed of me, Bob."

He smothered her words under fierce kisses. His young heart beat at bursting pressure. In bright colours he pictured the glory of Mobile, New Orleans, and all the world that lay before them to love each other in.

When Sally left the boat she had promised to come. Where the pine trees meet the cane-brake he would be waiting for her, at midnight.

At the top of the bank she turned to wave.

"Wait! Wait!" called the boy. He rushed up the slope.

"Quit it, Bob, you're hurtin' me." She tore herself from his arms and hastened back along the slimy path. When she reached the pine-wood she paused.

"More'n a thousand dollars!" she murmured. And a slow, satisfied smile crossed her shrewd face.

The sun, now directly over the tops of the trees, shot its scorching rays through the foliage. They struck the earth in vertical shafts, heating it to the burning point. Not a breath stirred the glistening pine needles on the towering branches. It was one of those noontimes which, in the moisture-charged air of southern Alabama, makes life a steaming hell to all living things save reptiles and lovers.

Reaching the cabin, Sally went first to the kitchen room. She opened a cupboard and, taking the cork from the bottle, placed the whiskey on the top shelf and closed the wooden door.

She crossed the dog-trot to the sleeping-room—a spitting snarl greeted her entrance. In the centre of the bed crouched the yellow cat, its eyes gleaming, every muscle over its bony frame drawn taut, ready for the spring. The woman, startled, drew back. The cat moved on stiff legs nearer. Unflinchingly they glared into each other's eyes.

"Git out of hyar afore I kill yer! You yaller devil!" Sally's voice rang hard as steel.

The cat stood poised at the edge of the bed, its glistening teeth showing in its wide mouth. Without an instant's shift of her defiant stare, Sally wrenched a shoe from her foot.

The animal with spread claws sprang straight for the woman's throat. The cat and the heavy brogan crashed together in mid-air. Together they fell to the floor—the cat landed lightly, silently, and bounded through the open door.

Sally fell back against the log wall, feeling her throat with trembling fingers.



"Jim! O-h, Jim!" Sally called from the cabin. "Come on in, yer supper's ready."

"He ain't took nothin' to drink today," she thought. It's nigh three months now; he'll be 'most crazy."

The man took from the ground a few sticks of wood and came on dragging feet through the gloom. As Sally watched his listless approach, she felt in full force the oppressive melancholy of her dismal surroundings. Awakened by the boy's enthusiastic plans, imagination stirred within her. In the distance a girdled pine stood clear-cut against the horizon. Its bark, peeled and fallen, left the dead, naked trunk the colour of dried bones. Near the stunted top one bare limb stretched out. Unnoticed a thousand times before, to the woman it looked tonight, a ghostly gibbet against the black sky.

Sally shuddered and went into the lighted kitchen.

"I jes' kilt a rattler down by the wood-pile." Jim threw down his load and drew a splint-bottomed chair to the table.

"Ground-rattler, Jim!"

"Naw sir-ee! A hell-bendin' big diamond-back."

"Did you hurt the skin?" Sally asked quickly.

"Naw—I chopped his neck clean, short to the haid. An' I done it so durn quick his fangs is a-stickin' out yit, I reckon."

"Did he strike at you?"

"Yes sir-ee, an' the pizen came out of his mouth jes' like a fog."

"Ah, you're foolin' me!"

"No, I ain't neither. I've hearn tell of it but I never seed it afore. The ground was kinda black whar he lit, an' jes' as I brought the axe down on him, thar I seed a little puff like, same as white steam, in front of his mouth."

"How big was he, Jim?"

"'Léven rattles an' a button."

"Did you skin him?"

"Naw, it was too durn dark, but I hung him high up,

so's the hawks won't git at him. His skin'll fotch fo' bits down at Andalushy."

"Ax 'em six, Jim; them big ones gittin' kinda skeerce."

Jim finished his supper in silence—the killing of the snake had provided more conversation than was usual during three meals among pine-woods people.

As Sally was clearing away the dishes, the yellow cat came through the door. Slinking close to the wall, it avoided the woman, and sprang upon the knees of its master. Jim grinned into the eyes of the beast and began stroking its coarse hair. The cat set up a grating purr.

Sally looked at the two for a moment in silence.

"Jim, you gotta kill that cat."

Jim's grin widened, showing his tobacco-stained teeth.

"Jim, I'm a-tellin' you, you gotta kill that cat."

"An' I'm a-tellin' you I won't."

"Jim, it sprung at me today, an' would have hurt me somethin' turrible if I hadn't hit it over the haid with my shoe."

"Well, you must 'a' done somethin' to make him. You leave him alone, an' he won't pester you."

The woman hesitated; she looked at the man as yet undecided; after a moment she spoke again.

"Jim Gantt, I'm axin' you for the las' time, which does you think more'n of, me or that snarlin' varmint?"

"He don't snarl at me so much as you does," the man answered doggedly. "Anyway, I ain't a-goin' to kill him—an' you gotta leave him alone, too. You jes' mind you own business an' go tote the mattress out on the trot. It's too durn hot to sleep in the house."

The woman passed behind him to the cupboard, reached up, opened wide the wooden door and went out of the room.

Jim stroked the cat, its grating purr growing louder in the stillness.

A minute passed.

Into the dull eyes of the man a glitter came—and grew. Slowly he lifted his head. Farther and farther his chin

drew up until the chords beneath the red skin of his neck stood out in ridges. The nostrils of his bony nose quivered, he sniffed the hot air like a dog straining to catch a distant scent. His tongue protruded and moved from side to side across his lips.

Standing in the darkness without, the woman smiled grimly.

Abruptly the man arose. The forgotten cat fell, twisted in the air and lighted on its feet. Jim wheeled and strode to the cupboard. As his hand closed about the bottle the gleam in his eyes became burning flames. He jerked the bottle from the shelf, threw his head far back. The fiery liquor ran down his throat. He returned to his seat, the cat rubbed its ribbed flank against his leg, he stooped and lifted it to the table. Waving the bottle in front of the yellow beast, he laughed:

"Here's to yer—an' to'ad yer!" and swallowed half a tumblerful of the colourless liquid.

Sally dragged the shuck mattress to the dog-trot. Fully dressed, she lay waiting for midnight.

An hour went by before Jim shivered the empty bottle against the log wall of the kitchen. Pressing both hands hard upon the table, he heaved himself to his feet, upsetting the candle in the effort. He leered at the flame and slapped his bare palm down on it; the hot, melted wax oozed up, unheeded, between his fingers. Clinging to the table top, he turned himself toward the open door, steadied his swaying body for an instant, then lurched forward. His shoulder crashed against the doorpost, his body spun half-way round. The man fell flat upon his back, missing the mattress by a yard, the back of his head struck hard on the rough boards of the porch floor. He lay motionless, his feet sticking straight up on the doorsill.

The yellow cat sprang lightly over the fallen body and went outside into the night.

Wide-eyed, the woman lay—watching. After moments of tense listening the sound of faint breathing came to her from the prone figure. Sally frowned. "He's too no 'count

to git kilt," she said aloud, and turned on her side. She judged, from the stars, it was not yet eleven. Drowsiness came; she fell into uneasy slumber.

Out in the night the yellow cat was prowling. It stopped near the woodpile. With extended paw, it touched lightly something that lay on the ground. Its long teeth fastened upon it. The cat slunk off toward the house. Without sound it sprang to the floor of the dog-trot. Stealthily, its body crouched low, it started to cross through the open way. As it passed the woman she muttered and struck out in her sleep. The cat flattened to the floor. Near the moving arm, the thing it carried fell from its teeth. The beast scurried out across the opening.

The night marched on to the sound of a million voices calling shrilly through the gloom.

The woman woke. The stars glowed pale from a cloudy midnight sky. She reached out her right hand, palm down, to raise herself from the bed, throwing her full weight upon it. Two needle points pierced her wrist. A smothered cry was wrung from her lips. She reached with her left hand to pluck at the hurt place. It touched something cold, something hard and clammy, some dead thing. She jerked back the hand. A scream shivered through the still air. Pains, becoming instantly acute—unbearable—darted through her arm. Again she tried to pull away the torturing needle points. Her quivering hand groped aimlessly in the darkness. She could not force herself, a second time, to touch the dead, clinging thing at her wrist. Screaming, she dragged herself to the man.

"Jim, I'm hurt; help me! Help me! "

The man did not move.

"Jim, wake up! Help me! " she wailed uselessly to the inert man.

The terrifying pain spurted from wrist to shoulder. With her clenched left hand she beat against the man's upturned face.

"You drunken fool, help me! Take this thing away! " The man lay torpid beneath her pounding fist.

Along the path of Pigeon Creek, where the pine-woods run into the cane-brake, a boy waited—waited until the eastern sky grew from black to grey. Then with cautious tread he began to move, his face turned toward the cabin. As he neared the clearing the grey in the east changed to red. He left the woods and entered the field of corn.

At the cabin he drew close against the wall and listened. A man's heavy breathing reached his straining ears. Slowly he moved toward the opening in the middle of the house.

Above the breathing he heard a grating noise; between the deep drawn breaths and the grating, another sound came to him; a harsh, rhythmic scratching.

The edge of the sun rose abruptly above the flat earth.

The boy thrust his head around the angle. A yellow cat was sitting at the foot of the mattress. From its throat grating purrs came in regular measure; between each purr the beast's spread claws clutched and released the stiff ticking.

Beyond lay the man.

Between the cat and the man, stretched across the shuck bed, was the woman; her glassy eyes staring up into the grinning face of the cat. From her shoulder, reaching out toward the boy was a living turgid thing; a hand and arm, puffed beyond all human shape. From the swollen wrist, its poisoned fangs sunk deep into an artery, hung the mangled head of a snake.

The swaying corn blades whipped against the boy's white face as he fled between the rows.

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## Sukey

ELEANOR BOOTH SIMMONS

IT WAS IN MAY, on a day when the farmer's little girl found the first wind-flowers in the woods, and High Farm was buzzing with the activity of planting time, that Sukey was born. Of the four kittens in the litter she was the roundest and the silkiest, and when her nine days of blindness ended, and her blue eyes opened to the world, she became entrancingly jolly. Her three brothers were rather common. They had the drab coat, the narrow head and pointed nose of Old Tomas, a disreputable fellow who occasionally visited High Farm to beg a handout at the kitchen door and tell Mrs. Cat how beautiful she was. Mrs. Cat always swore at him, but, as the farmer said, with these women you never could tell. Anyway the boy kittens were so plainly Old Tomas that their careers were cut short in a pail of water, and the farmer's little girl had a nice funeral for them.

But Sukey was the image of her mother, who really was a beauty. From some unknown highborn strain in her ancestry she had inherited the soft colouring and exquisite markings of the pure silver tabby, and she had bequeathed them to Sukey, down to the smallest whorl of the butterflies on her hips. Sukey's gaze, like her mother's, was wide and innocent, and covered many things. She could sit on the farm-wife's knee looking like a cat-angel, and all the time she would be plotting how to steal her knitting and tangle it in the blackberry bushes.

It was a good life, Sukey's life. Dancing leaves and her mother's tail to play with, tall nodding grass in which to get deliciously frightened at What-is-it that chased her, and sunny garden spots where a tired kitten could roll and stretch and slip off into forty winks. When the sun went

away there was the snug box behind the kitchen stove, and her mother's breast was a soft pillow and a perpetual refreshment booth.

At mealtimes Mrs. Cat sat behind the farmer's chair, demure but alert, and Sukey learned that this was a good custom to copy. For the farmer was soft-hearted, and even the farmer's wife, who didn't believe in feeding cats at the table, succumbed to Sukey. For the kitten had witchery, and with all her mischief she was mannerly. Mrs. Cat took great pains with her education, and when she was still very young she knew that a spot on her coat was a disgrace, that the sand-box in the room where they were shut at night was for a purpose, and that baby chickens were only to be looked at, never to be chased.

It was a good life, even after Mrs. Cat turned peevish when Sukey tried to nurse her, and took to slipping away from the house at night to prowl and look at the moon. If the box behind the kitchen stove seemed lonely, there was the farm-wife's ample lap to lie in when the family sat out on the porch in the evening. She lay there, one night in August, when a noisy laughing party drove up in a touring car.

They had stopped, they said, to see if they could buy some eggs. There was a big man behind the wheel, and there were two girlish middle-aged women, one in pink and one in blue, and some children. They crowded around to pet Sukey, and Sukey rose politely and made her little cat bow, murmuring "T-r-r, t-r-r-r!"

"What a beautiful cat!" cried the woman in blue.

"Real tortoise-shell, isn't he?" the woman in pink chimed in.

"She," said the farm-wife, "is a silver tabby."

"Tabby, of course," agreed the woman in blue. "We do love cats. We always go to the cat shows in New York. I'd just love to enter this cat in a show. I know she'd carry off all the prizes. We do miss our cat up here. I don't know why we didn't bring him. We've taken the Moxley place for the summer and fall. That old house,

you know, in the woods on the other side of the hill, a dozen miles from anywhere."

She took a ribbon from the many that floated from her dress, and tied it around Sukey's neck.

"Dear me," she said, standing off to admire the effect, "how I would adore to have that little cat to fuss with."

"Perhaps the lady will sell you the cat," the big man suggested. "You've got others, haven't you?" he asked. "I saw a tom running across the road just now."

"Oh, Old Tomas just hangs around; he's a born tramp. Of course we've got Sukey's mother. But I couldn't sell Sukey."

"Hey!" said one of the spindling little boys. "You'll prob'bly have a lot o' kittens right away."

The farm-wife repeated that she didn't think she could spare Sukey. Her little girl would cry if she woke up in the morning to find Sukey gone. But the two women coaxed her till she could hardly think. She wished her husband were there to decide, but he had gone to the village. In the end she weakened. She refused the dollar bill that the big man held out to her, but she brought a basket and put Sukey in it. Sukey didn't want to go. She clung with all her little strength to the farm-wife's bosom, and when the lid of the basket closed over her she gave a desolate cry, and then was still. The farm-wife could hear that cry long after the car shot away with its laughing people.

The farmer was quite cut up when he came home and heard about the transaction. His wife said she didn't know, herself, why she let Sukey go, but the kitten would have a fine home. She reminded her husband that Old Tomas and Mrs. Cat had been flirting in the orchard the last few nights, but he said gloomily that there wasn't likely to be another Sukey in the next batch. He was right; Mrs. Cat's new kittens all looked like Old Tomas; not a silver Tabby among them. He saved the likeliest one when he drowned them, and it took its place in the household, but it was



not Sukey. The little girl sometimes cried for Sukey, but her mother told her that she ought to be proud that her kitten had gone to New York to live in a grand apartment and be shown in cat shows. For the woman never doubted that Sukey's new friends had taken her home with them.

Christmas came, and the little girl tied red neck ribbons on Mrs. Cat and Young Tomas.

"If I knew where Sukey lived I'd send her a present," she said. "But I s'pose she's got a tree and everything."

"Why of course she has," said the mother. "Those people were just crazy about that little cat."

It was a hard winter. Day after day it snowed, and snowed again, and even when the clouds lifted and the sun came out the wind was bitter, and the snow drifted high in the forest. Deer came to the edge of the clearing to eat the hay the farmer carried there for them. Timid hares and rabbits forgot their fright in their desire for cabbage leaves and carrots scattered in the garden for them. Old Tomas, a mighty hunter in normal times, forsook the woods and took up his residence in the barn, and his hand-out at the kitchen door became a regular thing.

On a dreary day late in January the farmer, returned from a trip over the drifted roads to the village, brought out a letter from his pocket.

"It's from Alice," he said.

Alice was his niece in New York, and when he had put the team in the stable, and brought the groceries in from the sleigh, and eaten dinner, his wife read the letter to him while he popped corn for the child. It was a gay letter. Alice had had a raise at New Year's . . . her boss had praised her . . . the skating suit her aunt knitted her for Christmas was much admired when her beau took her to the rink . . . But here the farm-wife stopped, read silently for a minute.

"Well, for pity's sake!" she exclaimed. "Alice knows the people that took Sukey, and they didn't take her to the city. They left her at the Moxley place. They said their car was so full they didn't have room for her. They said

a cat could look out for itself, and they thought Sukey'd be happier in the country."

The farmer snorted.

"How'd Alice come to know 'em?"

"They come to the store where she works. The boss's cat was on the counter, and they started talking about their vacation cat. Minute they mentioned the Moxley place and us, Alice knew, of course."

The little girl had dropped her doll and was listening.

"Is Sukey all alone?" she asked.

"Reckon so," her father said. He made some popcorn into a ball with maple sugar, and offered it to the child. She pushed it away.

"Wanta go get Sukey," she wailed.

"Dearie, the Moxley place is three miles away, and the road's full of snow," said her mother. She folded up the letter and knitted for a time, her eyes on the window.

"Henry," she finally said, "do you suppose we could get through? I'd feel easier in my mind—"

"No use bein' silly for a cat that's prob'bly dead anyhow," the farmer growled. But he got up, pulled on his boots, yanked his heavy coat from its nail, drew his fur cap down over his ears.

"You stay here," he told his wife. "No use two people gettin' froze."

The Moxley place looked dreary enough when after a long hard pull, getting out more than once to dig a way for his team, the farmer reached it. Snow weighted the boughs of the yew trees that stood around the house, snow lay against the shut doors and blank windows. There was not so much as the print of a paw to be seen, or a snow-bird fluttering. The farmer trampled a path to the out-houses. There might be a hole or a broken window through which Sukey could get inside and find shelter from the storms. He saw one at last, a jagged break in the wood-house wall, and from a nail at one side hung some grey fur matted with frozen blood.

He wrenched a rail from the fence and beat the door

down. Sukey was there. She lay in a corner, her glazed eyes staring at him. One paw held two starved kittens to her flat breast. The other front paw was only a stump, and there was a pool of clotted blood under it. The farmer stood a moment, shaking his head, then turned away, but at the door he turned back and looked for an empty box, found one, and placed Sukey and her kittens therein.

"I'll bury them at home," he muttered.

It was not hard to reconstruct Sukey's life as it must have gone after her false friends forsook her. The farmer, unimaginative man though he was, could see it. At first she must have felt a great loneliness and bewilderment. He could see her sitting outside the closed door, waiting . . . waiting . . . Then she became hungry. She had never been a hunter, but now she hunted, though unsuccessfully for the most part. Still she managed to keep herself alive, and in January Sukey, hardly more than a kitten herself, gave birth to her kittens.

Now the foraging must be redoubled. But game was scarce, and it was a very nice surprise when she discovered one day, in a wire box set in a thicket, a large lump of something that smelt good to eat. True, the thing looked suspicious, but her need was great, and she thrust her paw in to seize the food. And the steel jaws fastened upon it.

Only the trees and the snows were witnesses of the agony Sukey underwent while she freed her severed leg and crawled to die with her kittens, but the farmer could picture it. His little girl was waiting at the window as he drove up in the twilight, and as he ate his supper he pacified her with a story of a beautiful home to which Sukey had gone. And when she was in bed and asleep he took his pickaxe and shovel and dug a grave for Sukey and her kittens, in the frozen earth of the garden where she had played so gaily a few months ago.

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## *The Identity of Diddums*

CAROLINE MARRIAGE

THE MOST BESOTTED admirer of Diddums could not claim that he was perfect. He was very lovely, and he was loving; he had sea-green eyes, and his markings ought to have secured him a prize in any cat-show; but I knew better than to submit him to the indignity of inspection by the common herd of humanity. Moreover, his tail had a curious kink in it which might have disqualified him. It was not visible as he curled it round his nose when sleeping, nor when he waved it, plume-fashion above his chinchilla back; but when a lingering hand passed along the length of it in a caress, it surprised the stranger, while it warned the lover, that the tail, or rosary of affection, would soon be told to the end.

He was not perfect; yet in the whole village—nay, I could have sworn that in the whole world over—there was never such a cat as Diddums, nor one worthy to be mentioned in the same breath. His very imperfections had charm.

Fussy about his food, his milk (or preferably cream) must be poured out before his eyes, or he mistrusted its freshness. In winter it must be warmed to an exact temperature; if it was too hot he would walk away; the saucer must be carried after him, and he be wooed to drink with honeyed, wheedling tones of affection, now that its contents were ascertained to have cooled to a safe degree for his kindly nose. If viands of an unattractive nature were set before him he would give one scornful glance, and as he turned away he would scratch the floor about the dish with disdainful paw in the rudest of gestures, as if signifying that an early burial was the only suitable treatment for food so putrid.

Then Diddums had to be served at once; no waiting for

him. Did he wish a door to be opened, one faint mew, or one silent, dignified gesture he deemed sufficient. An instant's delay on the part of his servants and he would rend that nearest him to ravel, though it were the lovely, ancient silk bag of my Sheraton worktable or the edge of a satin-covered draught-screen. I sometimes wished that I could wean him from such tricks; but Diddums had already absorbed as much as he thought necessary of the usages of polite society. He *knew*, but he did not choose to practise; and those who *know* are beyond the power of education.

Diddums allowed no interference, had no rival, did exactly what he liked. If his fate was, indeed, that which in nightmare moments I forbid myself to credit, I would never say it was a judgment on him for his past gay arrogance. He was one of the few to whom the best is a birthright.

And in that pretty, silken head of his he was for ever revolving plans for some yet better best; some dodge by which the best might never become monotonous. He would go out and get wet, come home to be dried and petted, and set out again at once into the dew-soaked meadows, all warm and brushed and sleek as he had just been made, for the pure joy of contrast. Of like tastes as the sailor shows in his leisure moments, no frowstiness of extreme warmth and snugness seemed too much when Diddums wished to be comfortable. But the luxury of a warm lap or the wool-lined basket would be left after a time, and he would lie on a stone floor for the fun of contrast, or in the draught of an open door; stretched at full length as if dead or utterly exhausted.

One winter's night as he was lying sleepily blinking into the red heart of a peat and wood fire, I heard a bump upstairs and the muffled pad as of heavy paws passing along the landing above; just the noise he himself would have made returning confidently through his window to his familiar home. Leaving Diddums by the fire, I lit a candle and made the round of the house.

A slinking cat is not easy to track after this fashion in

an old-fashioned, up and down, rambling house with two staircases; shadows sneak and move, fleeing and following the searcher herself. But just as I am giving up the hunt comes Diddums, his tail fluffed up, his eyes gleaming with rage at the thought of an intruder. Like lightning he chases up the other stairs, in an instant he has cleared the house of vagrant visitors; yet when I come back to the fireside he is there before me; calm, proud, as certain of his world and of himself as ever. Clever Diddums.

But the thought to me of a strange cat who has learned the secrets of the house is a disturbing one—a cat burglar who might come again. Nor was it long before he did.

One night some hours before dawn, Diddums asleep at the foot of my bed, stirred and swore softly to himself, waking me. To me also, suddenly sitting up in bed, it seemed as if I heard a strange footfall in the passage beyond the chink of my open door. Then, all at once, there was a tornado of cats; a whirling and birling, a hitting and spitting, a crying and flying; but by the time I had lit the candle, the fight was a flight. I was alone.

Diddums was ruffled next morning, sulky and rather anxious; and there was more chinchilla fur torn off and lying on the green alley between the lavender hedges than I could have believed could come from the back of any cat; even one so glorious as Diddums. I petted and soothed and brushed him; I told him he was a hero and the bravest cat in the world, yet he started and looked over his shoulder even as I spoke. For days the house was not itself; a lurking terror overshadowed it.

Just as we were beginning to settle down again into our old carefree, happy life and comradeship, something dreadful happened. Diddums was on the hearthrug lapping his breakfast milk. I had not seen him come in, and for once he had been too thirsty to fuss about its exact temperature. The French window was open as usual, my coffee was poured out, and the day's paper folded to display its most interesting page that I might read as I ate, when a second chinchilla cat stalked in, as bold as brass, and flew at poor

Diddums on his own hearth; a cat so like Diddums that at first glance he might have been taken for him. Was there ever such impertinence?

I rushed at the intruder brandishing *The Times* about his ears, and he fled with a strange cry. Poor Diddums had to be drawn from under the sofa and comforted with promises that it should never occur again. Alas, it was easy promising!

By day and night that cat stalked us; came in at doors, yowled outside the windows and climbed in by the creepers. We were never safe from his importunities, and I kept a loaded syringe in the bedroom ewer. Diddums, becoming the shadow of his former self, left his proud thrones of state for ambush in safe corners. Whenever I sat down he would spring on my lap for protection, his eyes turned towards any door which happened to be open. His once happy, self-confident security was gone.

Neighbours would come and tell me that they had seen Diddums wild and dirty in the woods. "The keeper will shoot him," they said; and I would answer angrily, "I wish he would! That cat makes our lives a burden to us. He is just a stray!"

Only twice did I see him myself. Once at nightfall when I was calling Diddums he crept up and fawned under my hand—purring, rubbing, wheedling. But when I picked up the creature, carrying him on my shoulder into the lighted room I dropped the ragged thing in horror, and he sped out into the night.

Another time he answered my call faintly from a high branch of the medlar-tree. He looked so forlorn and wretched that I went into the house for a bowl of milk; but when I came back he was gone.

At last someone told me that the gamekeeper had shot him and had added his matted pelt to the diary of murder he keeps on his outhouse door. Diddums and I breathed more freely.

Diddums grew sleeker and sleeker, more sleepily loving. The reform which I had given up as hopeless set in

naturally and without thought or training on my part; it spread itself softly and silently like the sunshine; I awoke, as it were, to the perfect cat, the cat I had always held up to Diddums for imitation, but which in my heart of hearts I had never supposed could exist.

He never tore the wall-paper, nor the silk bag of my Sheraton worktable. His ruff in winter was as lovely as ever, his gooseberry eyes as expressive; the funny kink in his tail still told my fingers when they were nearing its end. He could play merrily as of old, he would share a joke and follow my industries in the garden with a humorous eye and not always helpful paw. But he never scratched rudely about his plate, he had grown far too refined, too truly the gentleman; and he had certainly grown less faddy about his food.

How such an idea came to me I cannot tell; maybe it was on one of those sleepless nights which the French call white that the black abyss yawned before me, down which I have never dared to look curiously. As well as I can I drive away my suspicions.

It cannot be! There is but one cat Diddums, and Diddums is his name. Yet another cat answered to it; another cat came crying to me in the dark.

I will not let myself think, what good can it do? Yet there are days when I watch Diddums lapping any old milk without a protest, and standing in pretty, wistful patience for a door to be opened, when I long for some evidence of his former unregenerate arrogance. Can you not understand why a hot flush of something very like hatred should pass through me, and a dreadful suspicion, as I look down at the perfect Diddums, a reformed Diddums, a cat whose veriest enemy could find nothing to say against him save for the hidden kink in his silky tail?

I only know that were he to paw rudely or begin to scratch the furniture I should catch him up and kiss him in relief; and that aching doubt which haunts me might be killed.



## *The Totem of Amarillo*

EMMA-LINDSAY SQUIER

PERHAPS YOU HAVE heard me speak of Amarillo before. He was a yellow cat who came to us from out of the woods when Brother and I still lived in the little log cabin on the shores of Puget Sound. And he was, in those days, our very special friend. His coming to our home was most spectacular, and his departure was equally dramatic. As for the grand finale of his story, as I learned it from those who cared for him in his last years, it is so curious and hints so much of melodrama that I am afraid that some will doubt it. I offer in explanation of my belief that it is true, only the fact that Amarillo was always a most unusual cat. And the proof of it is that he is perpetuated for ever in the village of Old Man House in a totem pole, carved and painted. Only the truly great are thus honoured by the tribe of Skokomish.

Amarillo, the yellow one, was born, I think, in the woods. And I further believe that complete savagery was only a short generation behind him. For his ears were tufted as are the ears of a bobcat, and his eyes were slanted and amber, so that in moments of complete repose he resembled a Chinese mandarin pleasantly absorbed in thought.

He had grown up in a region where the law was that only the strongest survived. He had fought many battles and won them, and so had grown to a size unbelievable in an ordinary cat, another fact which hinted strongly at a parentage having nothing to do with domesticity and quiet firesides.

Still, he had within him the instinct of association with man. For when he first came to us, his lovely fur all draggled and covered with blood, he was sorely hurt and dragged a torn and wounded leg. He mewed pitifully and crawled to us, yet was afraid to let us touch him, and

sprang back spitting venomously. But the instinct that had brought him down from the woods to the little cabin, where he knew he would find succour for his hurt, finally made him accept us. He let us examine the wounded leg, suffered us to bathe it and anoint it with salve. Then, being completely unable to hunt or care for himself, he allowed us to extend to him the hospitality of our home. He came to love us, and adopted us, and when he was well, he stayed with us and became our friend.

Now Brother and I were so fond of Amarillo, the yellow cat, that we saw none of his faults; and when they were called to our attention by the grown-ups, we made excuses for them and pretended that they did not matter. For he was our constant companion during the day, and when I slept out of doors on the camp bed, I would, sometimes during the night, hear his soft "Prr-t," which signified that he was about to jump up beside me, and then feel the thud of his soft, heavy body, as he leaped. But the grown-ups did not share our unqualified approval of Amarillo and his ways. For he, never having had any knowledge of civilization, did not know, and could not be taught, that chickens were to be respected, and not stalked and devoured whenever he happened to be hungry. Neither was it permissible that he should molest the pigeons, climb up to the nests and kill their young. So, after all persuasion had failed and many attempts at discipline, it was decreed that Amarillo must go. And Brother and I were very sad because of it.

It was not hard to find a new home for him. He was admired by all who saw him, and many places were open to our choosing. But it was deemed best that he be given into the kindly care of a fisherman friend of ours. A huge, dark man with kindly smiling eyes, a man whose descent was traced from Indian and Spanish blood, and whose wife and kinsfolk were of the tribe of Skokomish. They lived in the far-off village of Old Man House, called by the Indians, Suquamish.

They would, we knew, be kind to Amarillo. They had

no chickens or pigeons for him to kill unlawfully, and there were rats and much small game in the woods to satisfy his hunting instincts.

So, on the day set for his departure, we took our friend, the Yellow One, down to the fishing launch which anchored at our float, and it was with heavy hearts that we set a dish of milk for him upon the deck. We hoped that eating would occupy his attention and that he would not realize until too late that he was going away from us. The Indian Fisherman shoved off very gently from the wharf and did not start the engine until the launch had drifted for a hundred feet or more. But when the whirring of the fly wheel startled Amarillo, and the churning of the propeller whirled the water into eddies of white and green—then he knew that he was being taken away without his will or knowledge.

He sprang to the gunwale and stood, for an instant, gazing out at us, his slanted, amber eyes wide with alarm. The Indian Fisherman spoke to him soothingly and moved toward him with friendly hand outstretched. But it was too late. For Amarillo, without an instant's hesitation, had leaped. We saw the flash of his yellow body as he sprang and the splash as he sank from sight. We cried out, because we thought he would drown. But he had no idea of coming to such an inglorious end. For the next instant he was swimming toward us, easily, powerfully, his tufted ears flattened back on his head, his body a lithe, yellow streak in the blueness of the water. When he reached the float, he climbed upon it, sat down with perfect composure, and commenced to wash himself with great earnestness and poise. He appeared to think nothing whatsoever of the swim he had taken. And that day, because of our entreaties, he was allowed to remain with us.

But it was, we knew, only a stay of sentence. On the next day we bade our friend good-bye once more. This time the Yellow One was fastened in a sack, and when the launch started its chugging way out into the blueness of the bay, we saw the frenzied contortions of the burlap bag.

and dimly heard protesting yowls above the throbbing of the engine. We watched sadly from the float until the fishing launch was but a speck of black athwart the jutting greenery of the Point. Then it was lost to sight, and we knew that Amarillo had gone from us for ever.

In the years that followed, we heard of our yellow friend from time to time. Once the Indian Fisherman chugged around the Point and into our tiny cove specially to give us news of him. And once the Old Fisherman, who made his home with us, put into the village of Suquamish to learn at first hand of Amarillo's welfare. We were assured, each time, that the Yellow One was well and happy, and that he had established a kingship among the lesser cats of the village so that there was none to dispute his authority. But the details of his tempestuous life I did not fully learn until, grown out of childhood, and many years away from the country of grey waters and singing pine trees, I came back to the woods and waters of Puget Sound; found at Suquamish our beloved Old Fisherman, with no trace of time upon the pinkness of his cheeks or within the clear twinkling of his eyes; found, too, the Indian Fisherman and his wife who had given Amarillo shelter; and learned from him, and from the Blind Boy who was their son, the story of the Yellow One's tragic, triumphant career.

Now, the Blind Boy was a carver of totems. And in the great darkness where there was no light, he found solace in bringing to remembrance the strange, almost forgotten tales of the Indians of the Sound. He made them live again, cunningly carved into symbols upon pine poles, and he painted them carefully, under the watchful eye of those who could see. There is today, in the open square of the village, a totem pole that the Blind Boy made. Upon it is depicted the story of how Teet' Motl, with his sweet-heart, Hoo Han Hoo, rode upon a dolphin's back toward a far country where the Great Spirit promised them rest and prosperity. Their progress was barred by a school of blackfish, those tigers of the water called by the Indians "killers." But the brave dolphin, with a word of encourage-

ment to those upon his back, dived into the depths of the sea, scraping up pebbles in his mouth. Then there came a great storm, and Teet' Motl and Hoo Han Hoo crept into the dolphin's mouth for safety. Inside they found the shining pebbles scraped up by the giant fish. And when at last the storm abated, the dolphin had indeed brought them safely to a pleasant country, green with trees and fruitful with berries. The Indians who inhabited the country used for currency shining pebbles. And Teet' Motl and Hoo Han Hoo, having many of them, were rich and for ever prosperous. Even to this day, said the Blind Boy, when the killers come from the south, then a storm will rise. So he portrayed upon the totem Teet' Motl and his sweetheart safe in the belly of the dolphin.

It was while the Blind Boy still carved the story upon the totem pole that Amarillo was brought into the household. And curiously enough, it was to the child who lived in darkness that the Yellow One gave his love and never-ending loyalty. He liked very well indeed the Indian Fisherman and his wife, who was of the tribe of Skokomish. He obligingly caught the rats that had formerly made merry under the cabin, and once in the dead of night he gave alarm of fire that had started from a chance spark, by mewing and rubbing his cold nose against the Indian Fisherman's face. He repaid the hospitality they offered him with a friendship that was staunch and true. But it was only the Blind Boy that he loved—and I believe, and would have you believe, that it was because he knew of the darkness in which the Blind Boy lived, and because he knew that in some ways his friend was helpless.

But because he loved the little Blind Boy so well, Amarillo was jealous of everything to which he gave his attention. During the long evenings, when the Blind Boy carved the totem pole, the Yellow One would sit on the table beside him, watching with slanted amber eyes, while the childish, sensitive fingers crept over the long pine pole, feeling out with a sharp knife the contours of the dolphin,

the killer blackfish, and the rude figures of Teet' Motl and his sweetheart. When Amarillo thought his friend had given too much attention to the work of carving, he would reach out a padded, yellow paw and pat the Blind Boy's hand. If there was no response, he would yawn prodigiously, get up and stretch, and rub his broad back against the Blind Boy's face, deliberately walking on the pole, so that he could not carve. Then, if his friend persisted in his work, Amarillo would mew sharply, a little angry sound that ended in a snarl. He would switch his tail violently, jump down from the table with a loud thump, and sulk under the stove, refusing to come out for commands or cajoling words.

Now, Amarillo was not the only four-footed guest in the household of the Indian Fisherman and his wife. The hospitality of their little cabin was offered freely to any living thing that needed shelter or aid, and there was rarely a time when they were not caring for some boarder from the woods who had come to grief. Once they found a pheasant's nest with the mother's dead body beside it, bullet-riddled, and the tiny, brown chicks scarcely out of their shells. They took the tiny things to their cabin and fed them so carefully that all of them lived, and would have grown eventually to adult pheasant-hood—had it not been for Amarillo.

At first, it was not difficult to keep the wee brown pheasant chicks secluded. They learned very soon to run briskly to the door of their wire coop when they heard a footstep approaching, and they were as friendly as if their parents had never lived in the wilds. Amarillo watched them with sullen, amber eyes, his tail twitching ever so little, his shoulder muscles moving slightly whenever he saw the baby pheasants running about in the safety of the wire enclosure. But he never attempted to molest them. And even when they grew so large that the coop was deemed too small to hold them comfortably, and so were permitted to roam at liberty, he did not try to pounce upon them—having perhaps in mind the punishment meted

out to him at our cabin the day when he tried to kill the chickens.

But upon the day when the little Blind Boy made his way out to the wire enclosure and called to the pheasants, who came running to peck at the crumbs he held in his hand—upon that day did Amarillo declare war upon the brown invaders. Never did the Indian Fisherman or his wife actually catch him doing violence to the pheasant boarders, but one by one they disappeared with only a bunch of feathers left to tell of their passing. And once the Yellow One came into the cabin with one tiny feather still hanging from his whiskers—he had forgotten to remove the evidence. It was the last feather of the last pheasant. So they spanked him soundly, and he snarled, and spat, and ran away into the woods, and did not come back for two days, during which time the Blind Boy missed him sorely. When he returned, it was with sullen, padding steps, and his amber eyes were rather furtive, as if he doubted whether he would be welcomed. But the family forgave him the pheasants, and made much of him, and the Blind Boy cried, holding the yellow cat close against his cheek. So Amarillo purred deeply, like an organ, and dug his toes comfortably into his friend's shoulders, and that night slept upon the Blind Boy's bed, unrebuked. For a week he would not let the child go out of his sight, but followed him like a dog, and every evening sat near him when he carved upon the totem pole.

It was soon after the incident of the pheasants that another woods friend was brought into the kindly care of the Indian Fisherman and his wife. One day the Indian Fisherman saw in the woods, near the village of Suquamish, a little lady racoon who had been caught in a trap such as they set for racoons in the Puget Sound country. A hole had been bored in a small log, and honey-comb had been put deep inside it. Then nails had been set in such a way that a racoon hand, reaching inside for the honey-comb, could not pull itself out without tearing the skin completely

away. So the Indian Fisherman found the racoon lady with one arm inside the hole, her bright eyes blinking worriedly through the black marking that ran completely across her face like a highwayman's mask. She was really very foolish to have kept her clutch on the honey-comb, for by releasing it and squeezing her little black hand together, she could have brought it through the nail barricade without mishap. But she wanted the honey-comb, and so she kept her hold of it, thus keeping herself prisoner—as indeed, those who set the trap knew she would do.

But the Indian Fisherman could not bear to see the little lady racoon thus a captive. For she was soon to have babies. He drew out the nails, very carefully, while she stood rigidly alert to all he was doing, but stubbornly refusing to let go her hold on the sweetness that was in the hole. He slipped his hat over her, then in her sudden alarm she withdrew her hand, all sticky with honey-comb, and the Indian Fisherman brought her to the cabin, wriggling and squeaking in protest.

He saw to it that she had a comfortable pen to live in, and all the family made much of her. By the time her tiny children were born, she was quite at home in her new environment, and accepted philosophically all the kindly attentions bestowed upon her.

They named her Betty, and her children were born in a box behind the kitchen stove. Soon afterward she was put into a comfortable cage in the woodshed. But one day she escaped from the pen and came into the house, with her three babies following her in single file, their tails curled up high over their backs, as if they had been taught just the correct way of holding them thus, and on every tiny face was a black mask through which bright eyes blinked in friendly curiosity at the new world in which they found themselves.

Now, Amarillo saw this strange procession with astonishment not unmingled with alarm. He had been away hunting in the woods when Betty was brought to the cabin, and the Indian Fisherman had taken care that he had



had no access to her cage or to her box behind the kitchen stove. Certainly he had never seen a racoon baby, with a black mask on its face, and its tail curling up neatly over its head. He leaped upon a chair and spat vigorously as the little procession trundled across the kitchen floor to a saucer of milk behind the stove. Betty took no notice of him and pursued her even course, her three babies following in a line, one directly behind the other.

Amarillo leaned over the edge of the chair and growled terrifically. Betty looked up at him from behind her highwayman's mask, and her eyes glittered at him. She showed a line of white, menacing teeth. The Yellow one continued to snarl deep in his throat, but made no move, except to settle down on his haunches and watch and speculate. If Betty and her babies had been out in the open, he would have set upon them without delay. But their presence in the kitchen disturbed him, made him vaguely uncertain as to their standing. For he had been punished many times for interfering with domestic friends. He licked his chops and continued to growl.

Then, suddenly, his temper getting the better of him—he sprang. The Indian Fisherman moved to protect the racoon lady, whose life he thought in peril. But Betty was quite capable of defending herself and her family. Although she had apparently given no heed to the yellow cat, yet she was ready for his pounce. She gave a shrill squeal and darted to one side so quickly that even Amarillo's swiftness was not equalled by it. Before the yellow cat could realize what had happened, she was upon him, her black little hands clutching at his neck, her sharp teeth digging through his thick fur and into the flesh beneath. Amarillo snarled and yowled with pain. He rolled over and over, seeking vainly to fasten his claws on the alert, darting body of the lady racoon. The racoon babies scuttled under the stove, where they sat and peeped with bright, inquisitive eyes at the rolling, scrambling whirlwind of fur—yellow fur and brown. It was Amarillo who finally cried "enough" in the unequal battle. His

authority had been undisputed for such a long time that it made his surrender the more complete. He bolted for the open door, yowling in wholehearted terror, with Betty astride him like a jockey, her hands deep in his fur, her eyes viciously sardonic through the black highwayman's mask.

Amarillo finally rid himself of his unwelcome rider by rolling with despairing energy. Having freed himself, he climbed a tree, spitting at every step, and found shelter on a limb, very high above the ground, where he snarled and spat, and licked his wounds, and had many harsh and bitter thoughts toward racoons and the world in general.

Betty, on the other hand, took her victory with modest simplicity. She curled her tail high over her head and marched sedately back to the kitchen and her babies. And after taking a refreshing drink of milk from the saucer, proceeded to give her children their lunch, while she tidied her disordered coat, pulling from it the bits of twigs and tufts of yellow fur that had clung to it in the battle.

Amarillo went away into the woods, as was his custom when insulted, and he stayed so long that the family feared that his nose had been put permanently out of joint. But he came back at last, very sulky and bad-tempered until he found that he was really welcomed, especially by the Blind Boy, who had missed him greatly. So he purred, and rolled on the floor like a kitten, and slept at night on the little boy's bed. The racoon family—who now lived under the house—he did not molest. Betty and her children came at will into the kitchen and the room adjoining, they even received food from the hand of the Blind Boy—and Amarillo did not seek to prevent them. Sometimes he would growl and spit softly, but when Betty glanced at him sharply from behind her menacing mask, he would blink, and look away, and pretend that he had not said a word.

The racoons were very cleanly folk. There was a big pan of water for them always upon the back porch, and into it they would dip every morsel of food before they

ate it. They would bathe regularly, too, sitting up around the pan like little, furry toys, dipping their black hands in the water and washing their faces and necks very daintily and properly. They knew where the Indian Fisherman beached the flat-bottomed boat in which he carried fish to sell. It was his custom to leave a few small fish in it after the day's work, just for the pleasure of seeing Betty lead her children down through the woods to the gravelled shore, the four of them in single file, with their tails curled over their heads, and all of them humming a curious little monotone of a song, such as racoons sing when they are journeying and are contented with life.

When the fall came, the racoon babies, quite well grown by that time, went away into the woods, and later Betty, too, slipped away, to be gone for the whole winter. They expected that she would return in the spring. But she did not, and they never knew what became of the intrepid little lady.

Her absence, as you can readily imagine, was no grief at all to Amarillo. His kingship was once more undisputed, and he was happy in the friendship of the Indian Fisherman and his wife, and in the affection that the Blind Boy gave him. The two were more inseparable than ever. It was rarely now that the Yellow One went away to hunt in the woods. He preferred, instead, to remain with the little boy he loved, to follow when the child walked about in the yard with the halting, uncertain steps of those who cannot see, and to sleep on his bed at night.

In due course of time he found a lady cat to his liking, and he brought her to live at the cabin of the Indian Fisherman. Only one kitten did the lady cat give birth to, a kitten who was almost as golden in colour as Amarillo himself. And Amarillo as a father, I am glad to say, emulated his savage ancestors rather than his immediate domestic forebears. He cared for the kitten much more tenderly than the mother cat did, for she proved after all to be a careless jade, totally unworthy of Amarillo's affections. Soon

after her daughter was weaned she went away into the woods, and the kitten, to whom the Indian Fisherman gave the outrageous name of "Whiskey Susan," grew up entirely under her father's supervision.

Whiskey Susan was the only one beside himself whom Amarillo would suffer the family to pet. He was not jealous of the affection they gave her, and even the Blind Boy could hold the snuggling, yellow kitten in his lap while he carved upon the totem pole, and Amarillo would sit on the table beside him, purring deep in his throat, his eyes closed to mere slits of contentment.

But one day, many months later, there came another, and this time a final, disturbing factor in the life of the Yellow One. The Indian Fisherman had found a small mallard duck caught in the meshes of his nets, and one leg had been broken, so that he floundered there, helpless, beating the water with his wings. The Indian Fisherman released him gently and brought him to the cabin, where his wife took kindly charge of the invalid, set the hurt leg in splints, and tended to his wants. It was upon the first evening of his stay that Amarillo, coming in from the out-of-doors, spied the newcomer. The Blind Boy, who could not see the Yellow One's approach, was bending over the wounded duck, stroking him gently. And at the sight Amarillo hissed sharply—and sprang. His leap did no more than knock the astonished duck over on the floor, but the Fisherman's wife was impatient that her invalid should be so treated. She cuffed Amarillo sharply, and he stared at her with furious, amber eyes, then laid his ears back on his head and trotted out of the house, his fur in thick, outraged ruffles, and headed straight for the woods.

He did not come back for one week, nor for two weeks. And the Blind Boy grew daily more worried and more lonely. He took to wandering about the yard, calling for Amarillo, and when his mother was busy, so that she could not prevent him, he would feel his way through the gate and set off up the trail that led into the deep woods, walking very slowly with his hands outstretched before him,

calling Amarillo's name, hoping that the yellow cat would hear and come to him.

Now, it was not safe to go alone or unarmed into the thickness of those forests, for many dangers lurked in the shadowed depths of them, and many were the tales told of bold attacks made by cougars and bobcats driven down from the high mountains by hunger or forest fires. Yet always the Blind Boy came back safely, for he ventured only a little way and returned before his absence could be noticed.

But one day he slipped away, having acquired some confidence in his knowledge of the trail. He went farther and farther, calling to Amarillo with louder tones as he felt himself out of hearing distance from the cabin. The trail became rougher and was unfamiliar to his feet. But still he went on, and at last he realized that there was a chill in the air that spoke of coming night. The woods were very still, with only the light dropping of pine needles to dot the silence, or the distant call of a heron flying to a tall pine-tree nest. A little frightened, the Blind Boy turned toward home. But his feet had lost their confidence. He turned into a ragged, wandering trail that led away from the true path. And as the night grew colder, and his feet stumbled over sprawling roots, and low-hanging branches struck his face, he knew that he was lost, lost and helpless.

Then he ceased to call for Amarillo, but sent up his voice in a thin, wavering cry such as the Indians use. It is a sound which carries clearly across great spaces, and the Indians know it for a signal of distress.

Down in the cabin it was nearly sunset before the absence of the Blind Boy had been discovered, for both the Indian Fisherman and his wife were at work mending nets upon the beach. When evening came, and they returned home, they looked at each other with startled eyes, and a great fear was in their hearts. For they knew the menace of the dark woods behind them.

The Indian Fisherman called the others of the tribe of Skokomish, and with that cunning that Indians possess, they found the child's light, halting footprints in the softness of the earth, and followed them into the forest, until it was too dark for them to see further.

They listened, and presently, from far away, a thin, wavering cry came to their ears. They responded mightily and plunged along the trail, the glimmering of their lanterns throwing dark, grotesque shadows on the path before them.

But suddenly they heard another cry, and they stood breathless for a moment, tingling cold with horror. For it was the savage, hunting cry of the bobcat—the cry he gives as he springs upon his prey.

Firing their guns and shouting fiercely, they set off at a run toward the direction from which the two cries—the call for help, and the call of death—had come. It was easy to guide themselves so, for the woods were alive with the savage sounds of fighting—eerie screams that set the birds to twittering nervously and made the men grit their teeth with fear at what they should find.

When they turned down the ragged, wandering trail, they heard above the snarls and shrieks a child's voice sobbing in fear. And the gleam of the lanterns caught a wild tangle of blazing eyes, white, snapping teeth, and rolling, twisting, furry bodies upon the ground. The Blind Boy crouched in the ferns at the side of the trail and crawled toward them, his arms lifted to his unseen rescuers. His father caught him up with a fierce sobbing of breath. And there came a fusillade of shots barking viciously into the whirl of writhing bodies. There was a sharp, sudden silence. The bodies dropped down loosely, twitched for a moment, then lay still.

Then the child screamed sharply. "Don't shoot," he cried, "don't shoot—you'll hurt Amarillo!"

The men stared. And for once the Indian Fisherman was glad that his child could not see. For there before them, in the trail, lay the tawny, dead body of a bobcat.

its cruel claws clenched about the yellow body of a cat—the gallant body of Amarillo. The body of the Yellow One was torn almost to shreds, and he lay in a pool of blood. But the wildcat had suffered too, for Amarillo's teeth were buried in his throat, and even death had not sufficed to loosen the hold.

They carried the poor, torn body very tenderly back to the cabin, and the Blind Boy sobbed on his father's shoulder. He told them later how, in that cold darkness, he had heard a light swishing of leaves, and then a well-known "Prr-t," which told him that Amarillo had heard him at last and was coming to him. But even as he had knelt, his arms outstretched to welcome the Yellow One to his heart, there had come a stirring in the branches over his head—and the wild, savage shriek of a bobcat. Then had come the leap that had knocked him upon his face. But before the bloodthirsty creature could spring again, Amarillo was upon him, fighting savagely, and the bobcat, surprised at the sudden attack, had fought back, for the moment forgetting the human prey whom he had stalked.

So it was that many years later, when I came to the village of Old Man House, known by the Indians as Suquamish, I found the Old Fisherman, and the Indian Fisherman, and his wife who was of the tribe of Skokomish. I met the Blind Boy, grown now almost to manhood, and I saw in the open square of the village the totem telling the story of how Teet' Motl and Hoo Han Hoo found the promised land.

There, in the cabin yard, is a little grave. It bears no headstone, such as a white man would erect to a well-remembered friend. It has a nobler, more fitting monument of gratitude and love—a carved and painted totem pole. At the bottom of the totem is the fierce, snarling face of a wildcat with white, cruel fangs displayed. Over the snarling face sits the stolid figure of a mallard duck, with one leg stiffly wrapped in splints. Above this are two closed eyes—eyes that cannot see the light. And at the

very top, in the place of honour, is the carved portrait of Amarillo himself—his yellow face benign and almost smiling—his tufted ears erect and alert—

If he could know this, I am sure he would be proud. For only the truly great are thus honoured by the tribe of Skokomish.



## Gato Mio!

ANNE ELIZABETH WILSON

BECAUSE I AM a lover of animals, I am constantly finding myself in amazing situations. Because he was a lover of animals, our janitor assured me, he daily exercised his unspeakably melancholy cat on a long piece of clothes line, the stationary end of which was fastened somewhere within a basement window.

"What kindness," I entreated him, "can you do an animal with as much of the wild in him as a cat, by restricting his freedom?"

With a delicacy strangely at variance with his Latin nature, he smirked apologetically. "Young ladies of this climate could scarcely understand."

"The cat is also of this climate," I parried. "We are more *simpatico*—is that the word?"

"Cats of all climate they suffer the curse, young ladee," he informed me sadly. "But mos' particular where there is snow."

Gato, the cat in question, investigated for the thousandth time in his circumscribed career, the familiar terrain of the strip of alley. A few pallid blades of grass had penetrated the cracks of the paving stones. He sniffed and nibbled them listlessly. Along the row of ash cans were scents maddeningly suggestive of freedom. Rats had scuttled past in the gutter of the fence—perhaps within the last hour, I judged from the theatrical lashings of his tail. He was pretending that just like any other cat, he might track them beyond—beyond this orbit of his debasement.

"This cat of yours is certainly participating in a curse," I snapped.

"On the other han'," my friend assured me, "I presairve heem." And he relentlessly took in the slack of the rope

from the window, dragging with it against hopelessly reluctant feet, the growling object of the Evil Eye.

The man was a Spaniard—a fact of which my house-keeper repeatedly reminded me on occasions when I had left her alone in the apartment for many evenings. So I bought her a radio. He was really a most respectful man.

"Ladee," Mr. Fernandez replied to me exasperatedly one evening when I had been a little more insistent than usual about the matter of his captive, "some day I tell you. It is a story of our people."

"All southern Europeans are cruel to animals; I can well believe it has to do with 'your people'," I sneered unkindly. "We don't like to see animals suffer in this country. We even have a society . . ."

"Ah!" Mr. Fernandez employed a Latin staccato. "I know this society. Every time it reads in the paper 'One sousand cats painless deestroy. One meelion dog put to sleep. . . .' Ah!" He stroked Gato's head fiercely. "Anyhow, he *leeve*!"

It seemed perversely reasonable.

"I tell you now!" declared Fernandez.

"All right," I said, "come up to the apartment. I want you to feel how cold it is, anyhow."

Mrs. McTaggart sniffed her surprise as Mr. Fernandez took a proffered seat.

"Mr. Fernandez is going to tell us a story of his people," I explained.

He had the cat still in his arms, a maternal picture oddly at variance with his brigand-like face, much flushed now with indignation and embarrassment.

"I may set heem?" he enquired, holding Gato tentatively over the sofa.

Mrs. McTaggart provided a newspaper on which the cat settled down uneasily.

"And now about this story . . ."

"Yes. It is what in a new country you have not . . . a story which is coming out of the years from mother to leetle one . . . which is told by many fires." The upward

slant of his eye indicated the poesy of it all. "Only you have also on Haloo—what-do-you-call-it, ladees who ride on the mop?"

I pondered this folk-lore. "Do you mean witches?"

"Ah!" The staccato was triumphant. "And behind them, also who rides on the mop, did you ever hear—" he stroked Gato's ears protectingly, "—of a cat?"

"Oh yes, the witch and her cat—usually a black one, too."

His eyebrows lifted at the significance of my remark. "A black one! Do you obsairve heem?"

Gato was all black save for a white whisker or two.

"In my countree," went on Mr. Fernandez, "the story is like this: From the snowy pick of Maladetta comes a great weend." He gestured gustily. "And on that weend, comes the Quin of Weetch, a ladee who make many secret curse. Behin' her rides the *gato*—a black one. They sail by miles in the sky, making many trouble, seenging many song.

"He cleeng. Some time she go so fas' he cannot hold.

"*'Caramba,'* call Gato, 'I cannot hold!'

"*'What for I geeve you long claw?'* say Mirabella." Mr. Fernandez squeezed Gato's forepaw to demonstrate the length of the feline talon.

"*'Mirabella,'* say Gato, 'w'en you do zat swooping I almos' fall down.'

"*'Deeg the claw!'* say Mirabella.

"Gato he get mad. 'All right; I deeg!' he say, and he leeft foot and deeg Mirabella on the hand where she steer.

"*'Son of a ruminant!'* yell Mirabella." Fernandez eyed me warily lest the dictionary translation prove too strong. "She is so mad she forget how to steer, and the mop beegen to fall. Past the moon they fall, and Gato make a cry.

"*'Ah,'* say Mirabella, 'May you never see the moon but a cry come from your heart!' She is already making curse.

"Steel they fall—they are in the snows of Maladetta.

"*'My feet is freeze!'* yell Gato.

"*'An' for the blow you strike me with your feet there,'*

yell back Mirabella, 'may you never know love without your feet is freeze.'

"The curse is made. No more will Gato ride behin' Mirabella. In the snow of Maladetta they land, and Gato run away. It is a story of my people."

I took it as a parable. "It is a good story, and full of sound zoology," I admitted, "but may I ask how you hope to break the curse with a rope?"

"I am only man," replied Fernandez with godly humility; "Gato is only cat. We do our best."

Baffled by the Latin temperament, I rose and walked toward the frigid radiator. "Is there any reason, Mr. Fernandez," I enquired, assuming the voice of Mirabella as I laid my hands upon its icy coils, "why we too must participate in the curse? My feet is also freeze!"

As winter began to set in, the curse became more and more evident in our dwelling.

"How long," Mrs. McTaggart asked me one morning, "are ye goin' to allow that dago to give us influenza?"

"No longer," I assured her. "We are going to move. I gave the management notice yesterday. Our lease will be up a month from next rent day."

Below me in the alley, Gato was enjoying a brief morning's sun-bath on a window-ledge.

"Kitty, kitty!" I hailed him from above. "Poor kitty!"

"Waur!" replied Gato in husky Castilian.

"It would take Spain to stage the inquisition," I remarked to Mrs. McTaggart. "The cat is a martyr."

"He's a nice clean cat," reflected Mrs. McTaggart as she joined me at the window. "I wonder is he house-broke."

"Anyway, he's heart-broke. He's a nice cat, Mrs. McTaggart."

She looked at me quizzically. "Are ye goin' to lift him?"

"I am going to lift the curse, anyway," I prophesied. "Give me your scissors."

With caution, I descended to the alley. Fernandez was occupied with the snow-shovel at the front.

Gato reared himself amicably as I approached. It took

only a moment to snip the rope and place him precariously on the fence.

"Scat!" I admonished as he looked at the vast field of adventure which lay beneath him on the other side.

"S-s-s-s-s-s!"

For a moment he stood poised, and I would swear that a broad and wizard grin spread over his face. As his black snake of a tail flicked over the fence, I could almost hear him say: "All right; I deeg!"

I hurried up the cellar stairs. Already Fernandez's crooning voice was audible in soft cat-cajolery as he entered his apartment.

"Ye better watch out," warned Mrs. McTaggart; "he might knife ye for it."

"Yes, he might," I agreed absently, for now from my vantage three flights up, I could trace the emancipated footsteps of Gato in the distant snow. At a point three fences away, they were joined by a parallel and friendly trail.

That night the malediction of Mirabella took audible form beneath my window. It was truly the cat-moon; a clear, cold night, admirably adapted to the piercing clarity of song, and frozen feet.

"Let him sing," I thought exultantly, as I rapped viciously on the radiator. But it was no use. I judged correctly that Fernandez was out searching for Gato.

In the morning there was no sign of either the rope or the cat in the alley; but by evening, I noticed Gato strolling quietly up and down. The rope was once more doing service.

Fernandez and I exchanged few words during the weeks preceding my hegira. He knew, and I knew that he knew. There was nothing to be said. I felt that I had tried to do the right thing by a fellow-creature. What Fernandez felt was only too obviously expressed in his baleful face. Mrs. McTaggart always kept the safety-catch on the door.

The day that we moved, I offered him a tip, as a matter of formality. Heaven knows, I bore him no good will.

"I will take no bribe!" he flared. "It ees settled."

I began to think Mrs. McTaggart was right about his character. His eyes were flaming.

"Just as you wish," I tried to be off-hand. "I'm sure I don't know what you are talking about."

"You will see!" He thrust out his chin ominously.

It was certainly a threat. My one thought was that we had better get away as soon as possible.

Just before the van was entirely loaded, Fernandez burst out of the basement door, carrying a closed basket.

"It's a bomb!" rasped Mrs. McTaggart, digging her nails in to my arm.

He stood there as though unable to make up his mind whether to speak or pass by—but in that moment a stifled cry rose from the basket.

"It is as much as done," announced Fernandez. His lip curled. "We go to the place where kin' Americans prevent the suffering of beasts—to the society where they painless destroy."

So this was his revenge! Well, I still had strength to thwart him.

"No!" I cried; "give him to me. Put the basket in the van. He isn't going to be killed!"

A look of sly cunning crept over Fernandez's features. If I had not myself heard that cry, I could easily have believed it a bomb in the basket. "Just as you weesh?" he mimicked, and executed a stiff-legged bow.

When we got to the new apartment, I thanked fortune that I had chosen a lower flat that opened on a garden paradisiacal for cats. I went into the kitchen and shut the door for fear the moving in of the furniture might terrify him. With many reassuring words, I undid the fastening to usher Gato into what was to be, as far as I could make it, a home of happiness and freedom.

Yes, it was to be just that. Within the basket were six blue, newly-opened eyes. We named their possessors respectively Mirabella, Maladetta and Fernandez, surnamed Gato. I believe it is sometimes the custom in the hill country for progeny to bear their mother's name.

## *The Undoing of Morning Glory Adolphus*

N. MARGARET CAMPBELL

MORNING GLORY ADOLPHUS is our oldest and most sedate cat. He has his own hunting preserves in a wooded ravine at the back of our house, and woe to the cat or dog who invades it. In his early youth he won an enviable reputation as a hunter of big game, and he has his own method of securing due recognition for his exploits. Whenever he captures a rabbit, a squirrel, a water-rat, or a snake, he hunts until he finds his mistress and lays the tribute proudly at her feet. This determination to be cited for bravery and prowess becomes a trifle embarrassing at times, especially when he drags a five-foot snake into the music-room and lets it wriggle on the rug to the horror and confusion of guests. But whatever the hazards, Adolphus is not to be thwarted of due publicity for his skill. If he were a man, he would be accompanied on all of his hunting-trips by a press-agent, and would have luncheon with the editors of all the sporting journals upon his return. As it is, without even a correspondence course in advertising, Adolphus manages quite well.

For the study of majestic dignity, tinged on occasions with lofty disdain, interpreters of muscular expression would do well to seek out Adolphus. He walks the highway without haste or concern for his personal survival in the midst of tooting automobiles and charging dogs. When a strange dog appears and mistakes Adolphus for an ordinary cat who may be chased for the sport of the thing, it is the custom of Adolphus to slow his pace somewhat and stretch out in the path of the oncoming enemy, assuming the pose and the expression of the sphinx. He is the graven image of repose and perfect muscular control. Only his slumbrous amber eyes burn unblinkingly, never leaving the enraged countenance of his enemy, who bears

down upon him with exposed fangs and hackles erect. When the assault is too ferocious to be in good taste even among dogs, accompanied by hysterical yapping and snapping, Adolphus has been known to yawn in the face of his assailant, quite deliberately and very politely, as a gentleman of good breeding might when bored by an excessive display of emotion. Usually the dog mysteriously halts within a foot or so of those calm yellow eyes and describes a semi-circle within the range of those twin fires, filling the air with defiant taunts that gradually die away to foolish whimpering as he begins an undignified withdrawal, while Adolphus winks solemnly and stares past his cowering foe into a mysterious space undesecrated by blustering dogs.

A few dogs there have been who have failed to halt at the hypnotic command of those yellow eyes. Then there came a lightning-like flash of fur through the air, and Adolphus landed neatly on his victim's neck, his great claws beginning to rip with businesslike precision through the soft ears and forehead of the terrified dog. Perhaps the rumour of these encounters spread among the canine population of our neighbourhood, for it is never counted against the reputation of any dog as a fighter if he makes a wide detour of the regions frequented by Adolphus.

For years the rule of Adolphus among the cats of his own household had been undisputed. Then came Silver Paws, a handsome young rogue whose satiny coat was beautiful with broken silver and blue lights. There was no question about it, Silver Paws had a way with the ladies. While Adolphus still looked upon him as a frolicsome kitten whose sense of humour was unbalanced by a proper sense of dignity, he artfully won all hearts and easily became the centre of attraction wherever he appeared. It was plainly disgusting to Adolphus to see the way the conceited young thing arched his back expectantly whenever a human hand came near enough to caress him.

If Adolphus had had the small mind of a punster, he might have observed, after the cynical manner of others



who have lost their place in the public affections to an unworthy rival, that the glory was passing out of his name. But he was never one to surrender without a struggle. He went to his nightly hunt with cold murder in his heart and a high resolve to force the spotlight back upon himself. Daily he laid at the feet of his mistress older and wilder rabbits, fiercer-eyed rats, and longer snakes. All to no purpose. He even played the heroic role of the deliverer when his hated rival was treed by the grocer's dog. He simply walked calmly up to the tree where the dog was dancing wildly under the limb where the trembling Silver Paws clung, and the dog suddenly remembered that he really ought to catch up to the grocer's wagon and it wasn't much fun to bark at a silly kitten, anyway! When the frightened Silver Paws slid down the tree, Adolphus walked up to him with the self-righteous air of a benevolent gentleman who has rescued a lost soul not because the soul deserved it, but because he himself was made that way. This magnanimous act gave Adolphus a momentary advantage over his rival, but the fickle attentions of the household were soon centred upon the handsome young charmer again. Then Adolphus took to sitting about the house, gazing solemnly past the spot where Silver Paws was receiving the choicest bits of meat with many endearing words, and smoothing his whiskers with a reflective paw.

It was about this time that Silver Paws, to the consternation of the household, disappeared. A search was instituted in the neighbourhood, but he was gone without a trace, just as though he had been whisked away on a magic broom. Mournfully we gathered up the playthings he had left scattered over the house—a bit of fur on a string, a bright-coloured ball, some dried beans that rattled in the pod when batted about by a velvet paw—and of these remembrances we made a heap in his favourite rocking-chair. "He'll want them if he ever comes back," we said.

A remarkable change had come over Morning Glory Adolphus. We had long honoured him as a crafty hunter

and first-rate fighting-man, but we had judged him to be somewhat lacking in sentiment, a trifle indifferent and unresponsive, as was natural enough in one who had achieved no small amount of fame. What was our astonishment to find that he had become, overnight, warmly demonstrative in his affections and sympathetically desirous of turning our thoughts from useless brooding over the lost one. It was really touching to see the way he followed us about the house, sitting at our feet to sing with rapturous abandon wherever we happened to pause. Forgotten were the joys of the chase, the pleasant pastime of disciplining unmannerly dogs. For three whole days he gave himself up wholly to the business of love-making. If we attempted to ignore him, he threw himself at our feet and lay on his back at our mercy, as one who would say that he bared his faithful heart that we might kill him if we could not love him. He walked about the house with the proudly possessive air of a haughty ruler who has returned to his domains after an enforced absence, and he curled up blissfully on the cushions where his late rival had been accustomed to take his ease. Once we found him stretched contemptuously over the playthings that lay in a little heap in the rocking-chair. It must have been a bumpy sort of bed, but Adolphus looked happy and comfortable.

Suspicion instantly seized upon his mistress. "Adolphus," she said sternly, "I believe you know what has become of our beautiful Silver Paws!" The accused rose stiffly to his full height, regarded her with the gravely innocent expression of an outraged deacon, and then, turning his back deliberately upon her, gave himself up again to the slumbers of the just.

But the suspicions of the household were not laid. "Adolphus is trying too hard to be good," they argued. "It is not natural. There must be something on his conscience!" For this was Adolphus's way of raising a smoke-screen, as it were, to hide his evil deeds. They had observed this in the past. It was all very humiliating to a proud soul like Adolphus, and he showed his resentment by

stalking out of the house and letting the screen-door slam behind him after the manner of any offended male.

The household followed him from afar. He walked straight to the ravine, where he was accustomed to hunt, and stood peering intently down into it over the edge of a cliff, his ears pricked forward, every line of him expressing gloating satisfaction, from his agitated whiskers to the tip of his quivering tail. It was hard to believe that he was the same kindly creature who had been making affectionate advances to us a few hours before. As we drew near we could hear a faint crying, pleading and pitiful, and down among the bushes we discovered our lost Silver Paws, too weak from loss of food to stand, and rather battered from the rough treatment he had received from his jailor.

The moment that Adolphus saw us looking into the ravine he withdrew in disgust, for he knew that his game was up. With lofty scorn he watched us gather up his banished rival, revive him with warm milk, caress and comfort him. With what dire threats had Adolphus kept his captive down in the ravine, within sound of our voices, all the long hours while he wooed us at his leisure, and what spell had he cast over him that the hungry kitten had not dared to come at our call?

While we rejoiced and scolded, the grocer's dog was observed coming around the corner of the house. He had grown bold during those days of weakness when Adolphus had been courting the ladies. But one look into the amber eyes of Adolphus, and he was off with a shriek, for he could see that the fighter was once more the master of his emotions.

■

## The Cat and the Cobra

A. W. SMITH

A FIVE-FOOT COBRA is a big one. A six-footer may exist. A seven-footer is unheard of. This, of course, applies to the common cobra. The hamadryad, or King Cobra, is known to exceed twelve feet in length. He is really dangerous because he will attack at sight. The common cobra will not. If he can he slips quietly away unless he thinks he is cornered. Then you will hear what is to nearly all human beings one of the most frightening sounds on earth—the hiss of an angry snake.

The inhuman "aah," low and throaty, of an angry mob, the drawn "wheow" of an approaching shell—these sounds are bad enough. But for real blood-freezing paralysis go into a dark bathroom and hear the sudden explosive hiss from the wet cement floor.

Perhaps it came from behind the tin bathtub . . . or from the corner under the window . . .

Stand still—stand very still.

You thought you heard the dry whisper of coils across the floor? The great earthenware *chatti* in the corner sweating cold water from its porous sides does not sweat as coldly as you. It could not stand more still.

The chink from the door ajar throws a shaft of friendly yellow light on the wet, shining floor. Faiz Ullah moving discreetly, laying out shirt (click go studs into shirtfront)—wonders what it is that keeps master . . .

Acutely conscious of bare ankles. Hair lifting on scalp, prickling the skin. Move softly—very softly. Take the big bath towel—oh, very gently. Hold it loosely, making a curtain in front of your shins, so—

Back out . . . gently, I said. No king deserves more reverence . . . And don't cry out. As you value your life, don't cry out.

Wheew—

Once again in the warm yellow light of your room with bathroom door slammed shut, feel brave again. Send Faiz Ullah flying for something long and strong, light and whippy. A cut down polo stick, for instance—that is the best—

*Ai, Faiz Ullah—polo lakri lao—Nag gussul Khana men hai.*

Shout and shout—send them running.

*Ai, Maharaj, nag gussul khana men hai.*

Slip feet into riding boots. Powder them first if feet are bare. You'll be late for dinner taking them off if you don't.

*Ai, durwan! Hurricane lamp lao—Nag gussul khana men hai.*

Wrapped discreetly in a heavy blanket, approach with caution—electric torch and stick of whippy cane in hand.

Butler, sweeper, *durwan*, *bhisti*, and the *bhisti's* son, *hamal*, *mali*, and *syces* two hang whispering at the verandah door.

*Hold the dog, Faiz Ullah—Kuttha puckerao.*

Fling wide the door, strike hard, cut just below the spectacles on the swaying swollen sac of the hood.

*Shabash—Shabash, huzoor.*

They will throw him out to the kites and crows, but not before the sweeper has removed the head in order to collect the Government reward.

"Sorry I'm late. I killed a cobra in my bathroom—eight feet at least." You may be nonchalant now over gin and bitters.

"More gin?"—"Thanks"—"No ice came up on the mail train"—"Sorry."

India is not all cobras, as some people think, but they are common enough—even in Calcutta. As a business we used to occupy one of those gloomy fortresses of finance off Clive Street. It was an ancient semi-classical affair of Corinthian columns and deep verandahs. The outside was

stucco which grew a green mossy beard every rains. The inside was dark and cool with high ceilings and creaking floors. It was so unpretentious and old-fashioned that only a firm of our respectability and reputation could have risked its credit by occupying it.

Not one of us would ever think of changing. We took great pride in our building—it had been ours for a hundred years—and we professed to look down on those who occupied the newly risen steel and concrete buildings which are so popular and cost so much.

The building was Jones' domain. As head accountant he was responsible, among other things, for its organization and upkeep, for the hiring and firing of the subordinate staff and for generally making the way smooth for those of us who were solely concerned with making profits. Jones, of course, had no more high office than to see that our actions were properly recorded in terms of *rupees* and *annas* and *pice*. His role was more or less automatic, in so far as anything can be said to be automatic in India.

He was doubtless a good accountant, but he lacked above all things that sweet nature and supreme tact which is necessary for the easy handling of an Indian staff. He bewildered them. He tried to alter age-old customs. In doing so he was always stubbing his toe. He might just as well have tried to change the multiplication table.

Instead of accepting the order of things painstakingly built up on a web of belief and precedent, he tried to treat everyone as a rational human being. From the head clerk down to the humblest sweeper, he thought they could be persuaded by the validity of argument. With dogmatic thoroughness he tried to explain that so and so was a better, a shorter, a quicker and a less laborious way of doing things—in short, that it was more efficient.

He was met with charming indulgent smiles and ready acquiescence—and nothing was done about it.

Moreover, he lacked understanding. He couldn't see why Rajah Singh, the sepoy, must never be asked to touch a glass of water, or why the waterman must never be told

to carry a pair of shoes to be mended, or quite why Shauqat Ali, one of the piece-goods bazaar clerks, wouldn't move a plate of ham sandwiches. (Jones often had meals in the office—disgusting habit, but Efficiency was his watchword.)

All these things merely caused Jones to lose his temper, which didn't do a bit of good. By degrees he learned better, although it was a slow process. There was always something to send Jones into a fit of inarticulate rage. For instance, one day he took it into his head to go over the pay sheet. He checked it with a blue pencil, name by name, all the way from Ahmed Ali, Chittagonian driver of the office car, past the Bannerjis and Mukerjis, down to Xavier and Zachariah, the Indian Christian wharf clerks. At the very bottom of the payroll Jones discovered—"Cats two—one *rupee* each."

He hammered his bell. The cashier was quite undisturbed.

"And why not—?" he asked in effect. Ever since Wilson Sahib's time there had always been two cats on the pay roll. First there had been only one and then two.

Now Wilson Sahib had retired somewhere back in the early nineties. Jones had met him in London—an elderly man in the middle eighties.

"But why—?" Jones almost frothed at the mouth.

"For forty years two *rupees* a month—nearly a thousand *rupees* on cats."

"It was the Sahib's order," purred the cashier.

Jones instituted an inquiry into the status of the office cats.

"I will make immediate inquisition," said the cashier.

"Not emolument for cats two, your honour," said the cashier later, "but subsistence allowance at *rupees* one *per mensem per capita*. How can cat get the salary, notwithstanding?"

He smiled gently at the whimsy. Jones found his smile particularly infuriating.

"I don't believe there are any cats," he said resentfully. "It's just another ramp. It simply means that the sweeper

or someone gets two *rupees* a month extra because someone was fool enough—”

“Wilson Sahib’s order, your honour,” said the cashier reprovingly, “but I will bring—”

In due course he brought—two meagre grey cats who struggled in the arms of the head sweeper and his assistant and swore volubly when Jones was rash enough to put out a hand.

The head sweeper said something which Jones could not understand. Jones had never bothered to learn any language but his own.

“That is senior cat—ten years’ service, your honour,” translated the cashier. “Sweeper say please he must have more subsistence. The old age draws on and it cat must get milk, the bowls one *per diem*.”

“Oh, shut up,” said Jones. “I’m going to sack both. We can’t have cats, of all things, on the pay roll—what with economy and jute prices and everything.”

“But Wilson Sahib’s order,” protested the cashier, who could not connect jute with cats.

“Blow Wilson Sahib,” said Jones.

With a lordly sweep of his blue pencil he struck the cats, two, senior and junior, from the pay roll.

Our building was old. It dated back to the eighteenth-twenties, to the palmy days of indigo and opium, when a fortune might be turned on a cargo. Into it poured rats like a plague of Egypt. They scuttered along the partition tops and swizzled their noses at us from the dusk of corners. There were great grey-scarred veterans who seemed to prefer a simple diet of paper and electric-light cords to the fat living of the docks and sewers. There were little brown tiddlers who nested in the cotton and jute samples.

We complained one at a time and all together, but on the subject of cats Jones was adamant.

“Ridiculous,” he said. “Two *rupees* a month for cats—I ask you—”

He spent untold gold on traps and poisons. He bought



parched corn for bait by the sack load—enough to feed not only the whole corps of sweepers but the waterman also and the waterman's son, the godown staff, the driver of the office car and the man who sold betel nuts and pan leaves at the bottom of the stairs. There were queer smells in dark cupboards—rotten cheesy fish smells.

"Jones Sahib," explained the sepoys with a knowing leer.

But to all the wiles of Jones the rats seemed to prefer the great calfskin ledgers which it took two strong men to lift.

It was too much. Every plague of over-population is followed by its natural antidote.

A sepoy was sent down the rickety stairs to the jute sample room. He was a portly and dignified figure in his smart blue uniform and scarlet *pugri*. He did not hurry, nor yet did he dawdle. He descended with measured stride, head up, well-brushed beard fluffed up to his ears.

He came up the stairs again in headlong flight. He had seen a fine cobra, he gibbered, playing with its tail at the bottom of the stairs. He positively refused to go down again.

"Nag—" the word spreads round the office like wildfire. The little clerks at their desks looked suspiciously at the floor. They hitched their bare toes more securely round the legs of their stools.

"Oh, yes—a cobra—" said the head sweeper cheerfully. "He guards the stairs—ever since the cats went. We sweeper folk don't use the stairs any more. I've seen it many times. It's so long—"

He indicated a strip of floor about fifteen or twenty feet to the wall.

"Nonsense," said Jones, who was busy investigating the claims of a new kind of poison. "A cobra in the middle of Calcutta? Nonsense."

It did look odd with the tramcars clanging in the street and a row of taxis on the opposite corner.

"Nonsense," said Jones firmly.

But where there are rats there will be cobras, fulfilling

the law of supply and demand. The office staff definitely refused to go up and down those stairs. They were perfectly good-natured about it and no amount of bullying by Jones made the least difference. To get at the samples we had to send a man all the way round by the street and in at the back door. It was a tedious process, but we accepted it, as one does in India, until the senior partner . . . He sent for Jones.

"What's all this," he said, "about the office being full of cobras?"

"Oh, nothing," said Jones a little uneasily. "Just a yarn."

"Well, everybody's complaining. You'd better do something about them—catch them or get the men to work properly—I don't care which. That's what you're here for."

Jones sent for the cashier.

"Kill it?" said the cashier in horror. "But, your honour—" he lowered his voice to a whisper—"the snake is holy—Our Lord Krishna, your honour."

"Well, get rid of it," said Jones testily.

"As your honour wills," said the cashier. "I have a friend in Kuccha Bazaar who is a very holy man. A snake catcher. For two *rupees* the cash money he will catch—"

"Fetch him," rapped Jones.

Jones found most of the office staff gathered at the foot of the stairs. There was hardly one among them who did not believe that when a man died without an heir his soul returned in the form of a cobra. Didn't everyone know the supreme importance of getting himself a son? Aren't cobras holy? Well then—

There was an air of tension. Everyone felt that something exciting was going to happen. No one knew quite what. In the hot dusty dark among the packing cases and the pillars supporting the building it was pleasantly mysterious.

"Haven't any of you people got any work to do?" snapped Jones. "Go away—*Jao*—"

There was a shifting of feet, a shuffling of faces, a pre-

tence of obeying the order. No one actually went. Jones decided to ignore his audience.

There was a ripple in the crowd and a little sigh went up. "Are you the snake catcher?" asked Jones.

The newcomer walked past Jones as if he hadn't seen him. He settled himself comfortably on his heels and lighted a green *bidi*. He sucked in the evil-smelling smoke through cupped hands and coughed.

It wasn't the snake catcher—only someone from outside who had heard that there was free entertainment to be had.

The crowd squatted on its heels, chatting. The show was free. Who knew but that it mightn't be surprising.

Jones grew impatient.

"He comes, your honour," murmured the cashier soothingly. "He sees if the hour is auspicious."

Upstairs all work seemed to be over for the day.

"He comes," said someone. A hush fell. The silence was broken by the sudden outcry of the small son of a friend of the head sweeper. Dressed up in a round embroidered cap and a heart-shaped silver amulet, he had been brought to see the show. He bellowed, rubbing his small fists in his eyes.

"*Aiee—bawa sahib—durro mut—durro mut*—Hush thee, princeling, don't fear—" said the father, looking round proudly, hoping that everyone had seen his son and heir. "See the fat sahib perched on the railing. Soon he will blow fire from his lips and smoke and serpents will come forth."

"*Chup tum*. Shut up you," said the cashier rudely from a safe and lordly eminence on top of a packing case.

"*Ai, babuji*," said the head sweeper. "Oh, come, sir clerk—the fat sahib lacks understanding, and it is but speech to a child."

Jones found the big black eyes of the infant fastened on him. Their earnestness embarrassed him. He stamped the floor impatiently.

Again quiet. The snake catcher, with due regard for

the effect of his entrance, came slowly down the stairs, step by step.

He made a deep salaam. Jones replied with an indeterminate kind of salute, rather an awkward gesture which was supposed to be one of condescension.

"Salaam, huzoor," said the snake catcher.

"Good morning," said Jones. "It's a fine day, isn't it?"

When this remark had been translated by the cashier the snake catcher had no hesitation in agreeing. The fact was sufficiently evident.

"Why does the fat sahib say that the sun shines?" piped the small son of the head sweeper's friend.

"It is the way of sahibs," said the head sweeper heavily. "As we say '*Ram Ram*'—so they say 'the day has well-dawned.' They find it auspicious no matter whether it is hot or wet or cold."

"Let's get on with it—" commanded Jones briskly.

"First, your honour," said the cashier, "first he do the *puja*. He very holy man. He must have money."

The crowd craned its necks as a silver *rupee* was handed over. This looked like big business. Money was being spent like water for their entertainment. Their whispering ceased as the snake catcher, seated crosslegged on the stone floor, erected copper coins and some pan leaves in a little pile before him. He drew diagrams, triangles and circles in the dust with a bit of iron. The point grated on the stone.

"That stick," whispered the cashier, "that iron stick very holy."

To Jones it looked like a simple piece of jute baling, but he hesitated to say so. The cashier wriggled his bare toes apprehensively.

With a quick movement the holy man rose to his feet pointing dramatically with his rusty iron at a crevice in a dim corner under the stairs. Certain of his audience, he walked across the floor. He began to probe between the blocks of stone. The crowd sighed a deep "Aah—." Even Jones was a little impressed.

The holy stick was doing its work. Immediately there issued from the crevice a loud and angry hiss. It sent the watching crowd pressing back into the dusky recesses of the basement. Jones felt the hair rise on the back of his neck. He shared in common with the rest a general distrust of snakes. He wondered whether it would be dignified to retire a step or two up the stairs.

He hardly had time to think. Quick as light a fine five-foot cobra launched itself like a whiplash across the smooth stone floor. Quick as light—but quicker still the holy snake catcher made a leap for the staircase. And the crowd found points of security on packing cases and bales of cotton.

To Jones was left the sole possession of the floor.

Somewhat bewildered the cobra coiled. It raised a hooded head, barring Jones' exit to safety up the stairs.

"Stand still, your honour, stand still," admonished the cashier.

Jones needed no warning. Horror-struck he watched the swaying head—a blunt thimble-shaped object standing out from the distended hood. He did not dare move. He squinted down his nose in a painful effort to see.

"*Lathi lao*," cried the cashier. "Bring a stick."

"*Lathi lao—maro maro*," "Bring a stick and strike, strike," echoed the crowd.

The holiness of the cobra was forgotten.

"What is the fat sahib doing?" asked the infant son of the sweeper's friend.

"See the cobra," said his father.

"Did he spit that?" asked the childish voice.

Jones stood. He was fiercely conscious of ankles and lower legs. He wondered whether, as he had heard, a pair of trousers was enough to stop the poison. And would it hurt?

Through long tense seconds they eyed each other—when, from somewhere in the dark, crept the senior cat. He was light grey, thin and moth-eaten. Ears flattened to his head, body flattened to the floor, he slid, experienced warrior that he was, with stealthy stride.

The Indian cat is not like any other cat. The hand of man is more than usually turned against him. He is about as strokeable as a porcupine, and the snake is a traditional enemy.

The senior cat crept crouching past Jones' legs. The tip of his mangy tail flicked convulsively. It was this which caught the cobra's eye. His weaving head changed its direction. It increased in speed.

Jones, white as a sheet, squinted down his nose at the senior cat.

The cobra struck. In that split second a lot of things happened. The cat leaped lightly to land over the cobra's back. And Jones—Jones displayed an agility of which those who knew him best could hardly believe him capable. In one standing jump he landed about five steps up the stairs.

The son of the sweeper's friend crowed in delight, but the crowd was too intent on the senior cat's battle to notice Jones. Each time the cobra struck the senior cat jumped. To one side, to the other side—or merely straight up in the air so that the snake shot beneath him. Each time he jumped he dealt a vicious blow with clawed forepaw.

After each attack the cobra whirled round to sit up on his coiled body, head swaying, hood extended, forked tongue flicking, and the senior cat crouched low to the floor, still but for the convulsive flicking of his tail. His growls were horrible.

Again the cobra struck with no loss of force. This time the senior cat leaped high, only to whirl around in mid-air. He dropped with all four feet extended, biting just where the head joined the spectacled hood. For a moment snake and cat lashed about the floor. The cat jumped clear. He left his enemy writhing.

For the cobra that was the end. The senior cat paraded stealthily round his victim. He waited only for a chance to close.

Jones mopped his brow. Fascinated, he watched the senior cat.

It was time now for the junior cat. With skill she sprang from behind a pillar. It was the turn, too, of Rajah Singh Sepoy, burly Rajputani from the fighting races of Lucknow. Black beard brushed up fiercely to his ears, waving a heavy bamboo *lathi*, he leaped into the arena.

"*Hut jao, billi*— Out of the way, cat—" he cried.

"*Shabash, maro, maro*—" "Well done, lay on, lay on—" chanted the crowd.

Rajah Singh laid on. The iron shoe of his staff struck sparks from the floor. The dust flew. The cobra was dead.

The senior and junior cat faded like lean grey shadows.

Of course, you may say it was a put-up job. If the cats were there all the time . . . you see what I mean.

Possibly.

This doubtless occurred to Jones, who was always suspicious of human nature. He debated the question for a whole afternoon before signing a voucher for reinstatement of the cats and incidental expenses. (To cash—holy man for finding one cobra serpent . . . *et cetera*.)

Jones also sacked the head sweeper.

You see, one of his visitors during the afternoon was a dirty dishevelled gentleman who forced himself into Jones' office. He claimed to be the head sweeper's caste brother. He claimed also that he had not been paid. He demanded to be paid. He presented, in fact, a dirty bill, for one fine cobra from which the poison fangs had been removed.

## Calvin, the Cat

CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER

CALVIN IS DEAD. His life, long to him, but short for the rest of us, was not marked by startling adventures, but his character was so uncommon and his qualities were so worthy of imitation that I have been asked by those who personally knew him to set down my recollections of his career.

His origin and ancestry were shrouded in mystery; even his age was a matter of pure conjecture. Although he was of the Maltese race, I have reason to suppose that he was American by birth as he certainly was in sympathy. Calvin was given to me eight years ago by Mrs. Stowe, but she knew nothing of his age or origin. He walked into her house one day out of the great unknown and became at once at home, as if he had been always a friend of the family. He appeared to have artistic and literary tastes, and it was as if he had inquired at the door if that was the residence of the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and, upon being assured that it was, had decided to dwell there. This is, of course, fanciful, for his antecedents were wholly unknown, but in his time he could hardly have been in any household where he would not have heard *Uncle Tom's Cabin* talked about. When he came to Mrs. Stowe, he was as large as he ever was, and apparently as old as he ever became. Yet there was in him no appearance of age; he was in the happy maturity of all his powers, and you would rather have said in that maturity he had found the secret of perpetual youth. And it was as difficult to believe that he would ever be aged as it was to imagine that he had ever been in immature youth. There was in him a mysterious perpetuity.

After some years, when Mrs. Stowe made her winter home in Florida, Calvin came to live with us. From the first moment, he fell into the ways of the house and assumed a recognized position in the family—I say recognized,



because after he became known he was always inquired for by visitors, and in the letters to the other members of the family he always received a message. Although the least obtrusive of beings, his individuality always made itself felt.

His personal appearance had much to do with this, for he was of royal mould, and had an air of high breeding. He was large, but he had nothing of the fat grossness of the celebrated Angora family; though powerful, he was exquisitely proportioned, and as graceful in every movement as a young leopard. When he stood up to open a door—he opened all the doors with old-fashioned latches—he was portentously tall, and when he stretched on the rug before the fire he seemed too long for this world—as indeed he was. His coat was the finest and softest I have ever seen, a shade of quiet Maltese; and from his throat downward, underneath, to the white tips of his feet, he wore the whitest and most delicate ermine; and no person was ever more fastidiously neat. In his finely formed head you saw something of his aristocratic character; the ears were small and cleanly cut, there was a tinge of pink in the nostrils, his face was handsome, and the expression of his countenance exceedingly intelligent—I should call it even a sweet expression if the term were not inconsistent with his look of alertness and sagacity.

It is difficult to convey a just idea of his gaiety in connection with his dignity and gravity, which his name expressed. As we know nothing of his family, of course it will be understood that Calvin was his Christian name. He had times of relaxation into utter playfulness, delighting in a ball of yarn, catching sportively at stray ribbons when his mistress was at her toilet, and pursuing his own tail, with hilarity, for lack of anything better. He could amuse himself by the hour, and he did not care for children; perhaps something in his past was present to his memory. He had absolutely no bad habits, and his disposition was perfect. I never saw him exactly angry, though I have seen his tail grow to an enormous size when a strange cat appeared upon his lawn. He disliked cats, evidently regarding them as

feline and treacherous, and he had no association with them. Occasionally there would be heard a night concert in the shrubbery. Calvin would ask to have the door opened, and then you would hear a rush and a "pestzt," and the concert would explode, and Calvin would quietly come in and resume his seat on the hearth. There was no trace of anger in his manner, but he wouldn't have any of that about the house. He had the rare virtue of magnanimity. Although he had fixed notions about his own rights, and extraordinary persistency in getting them, he never showed temper at a repulse; he simply and firmly persisted till he had what he wanted. His diet was one point; his idea was that of the scholars about dictionaries—to "get the best." He knew as well as anyone what was in the house, and would refuse beef if turkey was to be had; and if there were oysters, he would wait over the turkey to see if the oysters would not be forthcoming. And yet he was not a gross gourmand; he would eat bread if he saw me eating it, and thought he was not being imposed on. His habits of feeding, also, were refined; he never used a knife, and he would put up his hand and draw the fork down to his mouth as gracefully as a grown person. Unless necessity compelled, he would not eat in the kitchen, but insisted upon his meals in the dining-room, and would wait patiently, unless a stranger were present; and then he was sure to importune the visitor, hoping that the latter was ignorant of the rule of the house, and would give him something. They used to say that he preferred as his table-cloth on the floor a certain well-known church journal; but this was said by an Episcopalian. So far as I know, he had no religious prejudices, except that he did not like the association with Romanists. He tolerated the servants, because they belonged to the house, and would sometimes linger by the kitchen stove; but the moment visitors came in he arose, opened the door, and marched into the drawing-room. Yet he enjoyed the company of his equals, and never withdrew, no matter how many callers—whom he recognized as of his society—might come

into the drawing-room. Calvin was fond of company, but he wanted to choose it; and I have no doubt that his was an aristocratic fastidiousness rather than one of faith. It is so with most people.

The intelligence of Calvin was something phenomenal, in his rank of life. He established a method of communicating his wants, and even some of his sentiments; and he could help himself in many things. There was a furnace register in a retired room, where he used to go when he wished to be alone, that he always opened when he desired more heat; but never shut it, any more than he shut the door after himself. He could do almost everything but speak; and you would declare sometimes that you could see a pathetic longing to do that in his intelligent face. I have no desire to overdraw his qualities, but if there was one thing in him more noticeable than another, it was his fondness for nature. He could content himself for hours at a low window, looking into the ravine and at the great trees, noting the smallest stir there; he delighted, above all things, to accompany me walking about the garden, hearing the birds, getting the smell of the fresh earth, and rejoicing in the sunshine. He followed me and gambolled like a dog, rolling over on the turf and exhibiting his delight in a hundred ways. If I worked, he sat and watched me, or looked off over the bank, and kept his ear open to the twitter in the cherry-trees. When it stormed, he was sure to sit at the window, keenly watching the rain or the snow, glancing up and down at its falling; and a winter tempest always delighted him. I think he was genuinely fond of birds, but, so far as I know, he usually confined himself to one a day; he never killed, as some sportsmen do, for the sake of killing, but only as civilized people do—from necessity. He was intimate with the flying-squirrels who dwelt in the chestnut-trees—too intimate, for almost every day in the summer he would bring in one, until he nearly discouraged them. He was, indeed, a superb hunter, and would have been a devastating one, if his bump of destructiveness had not been offset by a bump of modera-

tion. There was very little of the brutality of the lower animals about him; I don't think he enjoyed rats for themselves, but he knew his business, and for the first few months of his residence with us he waged an awful campaign against the horde, and after that his simple presence was sufficient to deter them from coming on the premises. Mice amused him, but he usually considered them too small game to be taken seriously; I have seen him play for an hour with a mouse, and then let him go with a royal condescension. In this whole matter of "getting a living," Calvin was a great contrast to the rapacity of the age in which he lived.

I hesitate to speak of his capacity for friendship and the affectionateness of his nature, for I know from his own reserve that he would not care to have it much talked about. We understood each other perfectly, but we never made any fuss about it; when I spoke his name and snapped my fingers, he came to me; when I returned home at night, he was pretty sure to be waiting for me near the gate, and would rise and saunter along the walk, as if his being there were purely accidental—so shy was he commonly of showing feeling; and when I opened the door he never rushed in, like a cat, but loitered, and lounged, as if he had had no intention of going in, but would condescend to. And yet, the fact was, he knew dinner was ready, and he was bound to be there. He kept the run of dinner-time. It happened sometimes, during our absence in the summer, that dinner would be early, and Calvin walking about the grounds, missed it and came in late. But he never made a mistake the second day. There was one thing he never did—he never rushed through an open doorway. He never forgot his dignity. If he had asked to have the door opened, and was eager to go out, he always went deliberately; I can see him now, standing on the sill, looking about at the sky as if he was thinking whether it were worth while to take an umbrella, until he was near having his tail shut in.

His friendship was rather constant than demonstrative.

When we returned from an absence of nearly two years, Calvin welcomed us with evident pleasure, but showed his satisfaction rather by tranquil happiness than by fuming about. He had the faculty of making us glad to get home. It was his constancy that was so attractive. He liked companionship, but he wouldn't be petted, or fussed over, or sit in anyone's lap a moment; he always extricated himself from such familiarity with dignity and with no show of temper. If there was any petting to be done, however, he chose to do it. Often he would sit looking at me, and then, moved by a delicate affection, come and pull at my coat and sleeve until he could touch my face with his nose, and then go away contented. He had a habit of coming to my study in the morning, sitting quietly by my side or on the table for hours, watching the pen run over the paper, occasionally swinging his tail round for a blotter, and then going to sleep among the papers by the inkstand. Or, more rarely, he would watch the writing from a perch on my shoulder. Writing always interested him, and, until he understood it, he wanted to hold the pen.

He always held himself in a kind of reserve with his friend, as if he had said, "Let us respect our personality, and not make a 'mess' of friendship." He saw, with Emerson, the risk of degrading it to trivial conveniency. "Why insist on rash personal relations with your friends? Leave this touching and clawing." Yet I would not give an unfair notion of his aloofness, his fine sense of the sacredness of the me and the not-me. And, at the risk of not being believed, I will relate an incident, which was often repeated. Calvin had the practice of passing a portion of the night in the contemplation of its beauties, and would come into our chamber over the roof of the conservatory through the open window, summer and winter, and go to sleep at the foot of my bed. He would do this always exactly in this way; he never was content to stay in the chamber if we compelled him to go upstairs and through the door. He had the obstinacy of General Grant. But this is by the way. In the morning, he performed his

toilet and went down to breakfast with the rest of the family. Now, when the mistress was absent from home, and at no other time, Calvin would come in the morning, when the bell rang, to the head of the bed, put up his feet and look into my face, follow me about when I rose, "assist" at the dressing, and in many purring ways show his fondness, as if he had plainly said, "I know that she has gone away, but I am here." Such was Calvin in rare moments.

He had his limitations. Whatever passion he had for nature, he had no conception of art. There was sent to him once a fine and very expressive cat's head in bronze, by Frémiet. I placed it on the floor. He regarded it intently, approached it cautiously and crouchingly, touched it with his nose, perceived the fraud, turned away abruptly, and never would notice it afterward. On the whole, his life was not only a successful one, but a happy one. He never had but one fear, so far as I know: he had a mortal and a reasonable terror of plumbers. He would never stay in the house when they were here. No coaxing could quiet him. Of course, he didn't share our fear about their charges, but he must have had some dreadful experience with them in that portion of his life which is unknown to us. A plumber was to him the devil, and I have no doubt that, in his scheme, plumbers were fore-ordained to do him mischief.

In speaking of his worth, it has never occurred to me to estimate Calvin by the worldly standard. I know that it is customary now, when anyone dies, to ask how much he was worth, and that no obituary in the newspapers is considered complete without such an estimate. The plumbers in our house were one day overheard to say that, "They say that *she* says that *he* says that he wouldn't take a hundred dollars for him." It is unnecessary to say that I never made such a remark, and that, so far as Calvin was concerned, there was no purchase in money.

As I look back upon it, Calvin's life seems to me a fortunate one, for it was natural and unforced. He ate when he was hungry, slept when he was sleepy, and enjoyed

existence to the very tips of his toes and the end of his expressive and slow-moving tail. He delighted to roam about the garden, and stroll among the trees, and to lie on the green grass and luxuriate in all the sweet influences of summer. You could never accuse him of idleness, and yet he knew the secret of repose. The poet who wrote so prettily of him that his little life was rounded with a sleep, understated his felicity; it was rounded with a good many. His conscience never seemed to interfere with his slumbers. In fact, he had good habits and a contented mind. I can see him now walk in at the study door, sit down by my chair, bring his tail artistically about his feet, and look up at me with unspeakable happiness in his handsome face. I often thought that he felt the dumb limitation which denied him the power of language. But since he was denied speech, he scorned the inarticulate mouthings of the lower animals. The vulgar mewing and yowling of the cat species was beneath him; he sometimes uttered a sort of articulate and well-bred ejaculation, when he wished to call attention to something that he considered remarkable, or to some want of his, but he never went whining about. He would sit for hours at a closed window, when he desired to enter, without a murmur, and when it was opened he never admitted that he had been impatient by "bolting" in. Though speech he had not, and the unpleasant kind of utterance given to his race he would not use, he had a mighty power of purr to express his measureless content with congenial society. There was in him a musical organ with stops of varied power and expression, upon which I have no doubt he could have performed Scarlatti's celebrated cat's-fugue.

Whether Calvin died of old age, or was carried off by one of the diseases incident to youth, it is impossible to say; for his departure was as quiet as his advent was mysterious. I only know that he appeared to us in this world in his perfect stature and beauty, and that after a time, like Lohengrin, he withdrew. In his illness there was nothing more to be regretted than in all his blameless

life. I suppose there never was an illness that had more dignity and sweetness and resignation in it. It came on gradually, in a kind of listlessness and want of appetite. An alarming symptom was his preference for the warmth of a furnace-register to the lively sparkle of the open wood-fire. Whatever pain he suffered, he bore it in silence, and seemed only anxious not to obtrude his malady. We tempted him with the delicacies of the season, but it soon became impossible for him to eat, and for two weeks he ate or drank scarcely anything. Sometimes he made an effort to take something, but it was evident that he made the effort to please us. The neighbours—and I am convinced that the advice of neighbours is never good for anything—suggested catnip. He wouldn't even smell it. We had the attendance of an amateur practitioner of medicine, whose real office was the cure of souls, but nothing touched his case. He took what was offered, but it was with the air of one to whom the time for pellets was passed. He sat or lay day after day almost motionless, never once making a display of those vulgar convulsions or contortions of pain which are so disagreeable to society. His favourite place was on the brightest spot of a Smyrna rug by the conservatory, where the sunlight fell and he could hear the fountain play. If we went to him and exhibited our interest in his condition, he always purred in recognition of our sympathy. And when I spoke his name, he looked up with an expression that said, "I understand it, old fellow, but it's no use." He was to all who came to visit him a model of calmness and patience in affliction.

I was absent from home at the last, but heard by daily postal-card of his failing condition; and never again saw him alive. One sunny morning, he rose from his rug, went into the conservatory (he was very thin then), walked around it deliberately, looking at all the plants he knew, and then went to the bay-window in the dining-room, and stood a long time looking out upon the little field, now brown and sere, and toward the garden, where perhaps the happiest hours of his life had been spent. It was a last



look. He turned and walked away, laid himself down upon the bright spot in the rug, and quietly died.

It is not too much to say that a little shock went through the neighbourhood when it was known that Calvin was dead, so marked was his individuality; and his friends, one after another, came in to see him. There was no sentimental nonsense about his obsequies; it was felt that any parade would have been distasteful to him. John, who acted as undertaker, prepared a candle-box for him, and I believe assumed a professional decorum; but there may have been the usual levity underneath, for I heard that he remarked in the kitchen that it was the "driest wake he ever attended." Everybody, however, felt a fondness for Calvin, and regarded him with a certain respect. Between him and Bertha there existed a great friendship, and she apprehended his nature; she used to say that sometimes she was afraid of him, he looked at her so intelligently; she was never certain that he was what he appeared to be.

When I returned, they had laid Calvin on a table in an upper chamber by an open window. It was February. He reposed in a candle-box, lined about the edge with evergreen, and at his head stood a little wine-glass with flowers. He lay with his head tucked down in his arms—a favourite position of his before the fire—as if asleep in the comfort of his soft and exquisite fur. It was the involuntary exclamation of those who saw him, "How natural he looks!" As for myself, I said nothing. John buried him under the twin hawthorn-trees—one white and the other pink—in a spot where Calvin was fond of lying and listening to the hum of summer insects and the twitter of birds.

Perhaps I have failed to make appear the individuality of character that was so evident to those who knew him. At any rate, I have set down nothing concerning him but the literal truth. He was always a mystery. I did not know whence he came; I do not know whither he has gone. I would not weave one spray of falsehood in the wreath I lay upon his grave.

## *How a Cat played Robinson Crusoe*

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

THE ISLAND WAS a mere sandbank off the low, flat coast. Not a tree broke its bleak levels—not even a shrub. But the long, gritty stalks of the marsh grass clothed it everywhere above tide-mark; and a tiny rivulet of sweet water, flowing from a spring at its centre, drew a ribbon of inland herbage and tenderer green across the harsh and sombre yellow grey of the grass. Few would have chosen the island as a place to live, yet at its seaward end, where the changing tides were never still, stood a spacious, one-storied, wide-verandaed cottage, with a low shed behind it. The virtue of this lone plot of sand was coolness. When the neighbour mainland would be sweltering day and night alike under a breathless heat, out here on the island there was always a cool wind blowing. Therefore a wise city dweller had appropriated the sea waif and built his summer home thereon, where the tonic airs might bring back the rose to the pale cheeks of his children.

The family came to the island toward the end of June. In the first week of September they went away, leaving every door and window of house and shed securely shuttered, bolted or barred against the winter's storms. A roomy boat, rowed by two fishermen, carried them across the half mile of racing tides that separated them from the mainland. The elders of the household were not sorry to get back to the world of men, after two months of mere wind, and sun, and waves, and waving grass tops. But the children went with tear-stained faces. They were leaving behind them their favourite pet, the accustomed comrade of their migrations, a handsome, moon-faced cat, striped like a tiger. The animal had mysteriously disappeared two days before, vanishing from the face of the island without leaving a trace behind. The only reasonable explanation

seemed to be that she had been snapped up by a passing eagle. The cat, meanwhile, was a fast prisoner at the other end of the island, hidden beneath a broken barrel and some hundredweight of drifted sand.

The old barrel, with the staves battered out of one side, had stood, half buried, on the crest of a sand ridge raised by a long prevailing wind. Under its lee the cat had found a sheltered hollow, full of sun, where she had been wont to lie curled up for hours at a time, basking and sleeping. Meanwhile the sand had been steadily piling itself higher and higher behind the unstable barrier. At last it had piled too high; and suddenly, before a stronger gust, the barrel had come toppling over beneath a mass of sand, burying the sleeping cat out of sight and light. But at the same time the sound half of the barrel had formed a safe roof to her prison, and she was neither crushed nor smothered. When the children in their anxious search all over the island chanced upon the mound of fine, white sand they gave it but one careless look. They could not hear the faint cries that came, at intervals, from the close darkness within. So they went away sorrowfully, little dreaming that their friend was imprisoned almost beneath their feet.

For three days the prisoner kept up her appeals for help. On the third day the wind changed and presently blew up a gale. In a few hours it had uncovered the barrel. At one corner a tiny spot of light appeared.

Eagerly the cat stuck her paw through the hole. When she withdrew it again the hole was much enlarged. She took the hint and fell to scratching. At first her efforts were rather aimless; but presently, whether by good luck or quick sagacity, she learned to make her scratching more effective. The opening rapidly enlarged, and at last she was able to squeeze her way out.

The wind was tearing madly across the island, filled with flying sand. The seas hurled themselves trampling up the beach, with the uproar of a bombardment. The grasses lay bowed flat in long quivering ranks. Over the turmoil

the sun stared down from a deep, unclouded blue. The cat, when first she met the full force of the gale, was fairly blown off her feet. As soon as she could recover herself she crouched low and darted into the grasses for shelter. But there was little shelter there, the long stalks being held down almost level. Through their lashed lines, however, she sped straight before the gale, making for the cottage at the other end of the island, where she would find, as she fondly imagined, not only food and shelter but also loving comfort to make her forget her terrors.

Still and desolate in the bright sunshine and the tearing wind, the house frightened her. She could not understand the tight-closed shutters, the blind, unresponding doors that would no longer open to her anxious appeal. The wind swept her savagely across the naked veranda. Climbing with difficulty to the dining-room windowsill, where so often she had been let in, she clung there a few moments and yowled heartbrokenly. Then, in a sudden panic, she jumped down and ran to the shed. That, too, was closed. Never before had she seen the shed doors closed, and she could not understand it. Cautiously she crept around the foundations—but those had been built honestly: there was no such thing as getting in that way. On every side it was nothing but a blank, forbidding face that the old familiar house confronted her with.

The cat had always been so coddled and pampered by the children that she had had no need to forage for herself; but, fortunately for her, she had learned to hunt the marsh mice and grass sparrows for amusement. So now, being ravenous from her long fast under the sand, she slunk mournfully away from the deserted house and crept along under the lee of a sand ridge to a little grassy hollow which she knew. Here the gale caught only the tops of the grasses; and here, in the warmth and comparative calm, the furry little marsh folk, mice and shrews, were going about their business undisturbed.

The cat, quick and stealthy, soon caught one and eased her hunger. She caught several. And then, making her

way back to the house, she spent hours in heartsick prowling around it and around, sniffing and peering, yowling piteously on the threshold and windowsill; and every now and then being blown ignominiously across the smooth, naked expanse of the veranda floor. At last, hopelessly discouraged, she curled herself up beneath the children's window and went to sleep.

In spite of her loneliness and grief the life of the island prisoner during the next two or three weeks was by no means one of hardship. Besides her abundant food of birds and mice she quickly learned to catch tiny fish in the mouth of the rivulet, where salt water and fresh water met. It was an exciting game, and she became expert at dashing the grey tom-cod and blue-and-silver sand-lance far up the slope with a sweep of her armed paw. But when the equinoctial storms roared down upon the island, with furious rain, and low, black clouds torn to shreds, then life became more difficult for her. Game all took to cover, where it was hard to find. It was difficult to get around in the drenched and lashing grass; and, moreover, she loathed wet. Most of the time she went hungry, sitting sullen and desolate under the lee of the house, glaring out defiantly at the rush and battling tumult of the waves.

The storm lasted nearly ten days before it blew itself clean out. On the eighth day the abandoned wreck of a small Nova Scotia schooner drove ashore, battered out of all likeness to a ship. But hulk as it was it had passengers of a sort. A horde of rats got through the surf and scurried into the hiding of the grass roots. They promptly made themselves at home, burrowing under the grass and beneath old, half-buried timbers, and carrying panic into the ranks of the mice and shrews.

When the storm was over the cat had a decided surprise in her first long hunting expedition. Something had rustled the grass heavily and she trailed it, expecting a particularly large, fat marsh mouse. When she pounced and alighted upon an immense old ship's rat, many-voyaged and many-battled, she got badly bitten. Such an experience had

never before fallen to her lot. At first she felt so injured that she was on the point of backing out and running away. Then her latent pugnacity awoke, and the fire of far-off ancestors. She flung herself into the fight with a rage that took no accounting of the wounds she got; and the struggle was soon over. Her wounds, faithfully licked, quickly healed themselves in that clean and tonic air; and after that, having learned how to handle such big game, she no more got bitten.

During the first full moon after her abandonment—the first week in October—the island was visited by still weather with sharp night frosts. The cat discovered then that it was most exciting to hunt by night and do her sleeping in the daytime. She found that now, under the strange whiteness of the moon, all her game was astir—except the birds, which had fled to the mainland during the storm, gathering for the southward flight. The blanched grasses, she found, were now everywhere a-rustle; and everywhere dim little shapes went darting with thin squeaks across ghostly-white sands. Also she made the acquaintance of a new bird, which she regarded at first uneasily and then with vengeful wrath. This was the brown marsh owl, which came over from the mainland to do some autumn mouse hunting. There were two pairs of these big, downy-winged, round-eyed hunters, and they did not know there was a cat on the island.

The cat, spying one of them as it swooped soundlessly hither and thither over the silvered grass tops, crouched with flattened ears. With its wide spread of wing it looked bigger than herself; and the great round face, with hooked beak and wild, staring eyes, appeared extremely formidable. However, she was no coward; and presently, though not without reasonable caution, she went about her hunting. Suddenly the owl caught a partial glimpse of her in the grass—probably of her ears or head. He swooped; and at the same instant she sprang upward to meet the assault, spitting and growling harshly and striking with unsheathed claws. With a frantic flapping of his great wings the owl

checked himself and drew back into the air, just escaping the clutch of those indignant claws. After that the marsh owls were careful to give her a wide berth. They realized that the black-striped animal with the quick spring and the clutching claws was not to be interfered with. They perceived that she was some relation to that ferocious prowler, the lynx.

In spite of all this hunting, however, the furry life of the marsh grass was so teeming, so inexhaustible, that the depredations of cat, rats and owls were powerless to make more than a passing impression upon it. So the hunting and the merrymaking went on side by side under the indifferent moon.

As the winter deepened—with bursts of sharp cold and changing winds that forced the cat to be continually changing her refuge—she grew more and more unhappy. She felt her homelessness keenly. Nowhere on the whole island could she find a nook where she might feel secure from both wind and rain. As for the old barrel, the first cause of her misfortunes, there was no help in that. The winds had long ago turned it completely over, open to the sky, then drifted it full of sand and reburied it. And in any case the cat would have been afraid to go near it again. So it came about that she alone of all the island dwellers had no shelter to turn to when the real winter arrived, with snows that smothered the grass tops out of sight, and frosts that lined the shore with grinding ice cakes. The rats had their holes under the buried fragments of wreckage; the mice and shrews had their deep, warm tunnels; the owls had nests in hollow trees far away in the forests of the mainland. But the cat, shivering and frightened, could do nothing but crouch against the blind walls of the unrelenting house and let the snow whirl itself and pile itself about her.

And now, in her misery, she found her food cut off. The mice ran secure in their hidden runways, where the grass roots on each side of them gave them easy and abundant provender. The rats, too, were out of sight—digging

burrows themselves in the soft snow in the hope of intercepting some of the tunnels of the mice, and now and then snapping up an unwary passer-by. The ice fringe, crumbling and heaving under the ruthless tide, put an end to her fishing. She would have tried to capture one of the formidable owls in her hunger, but the owls no longer came to the island. They would return, no doubt, later in the season when the snow had hardened and the mice had begun to come out and play on the surface. But for the present they were following an easier chase in the deeps of the upland forest.

When the snow stopped falling and the sun came out again there fell such keen cold as the cat had never felt before. The day, as it chanced, was Christmas; and if the cat had had any idea as to the calendar she would certainly have marked the day in her memory as it was an eventful one for her. Starving as she was she could not sleep, but kept ceaselessly on the prowl. This was fortunate, for had she gone to sleep without any more shelter than the wall of the house she would never have wakened again. In her restlessness she wandered to the farther side of the island where, in a somewhat sheltered and sunny recess of the shore facing the mainland, she found a patch of bare sand, free of ice cakes and just uncovered by the tide. Opening upon this recess were the tiny entrances to several of the mouse tunnels.

Close beside one of these holes in the snow the cat crouched, quiveringly intent. For ten minutes or more she waited, never so much as twitching a whisker. At last a mouse thrust out its little pointed head. Not daring to give it time to change its mind or take alarm, she pounced. The mouse, glimpsing the doom ere it fell, doubled back upon itself in the narrow runway. Hardly realizing what she did in her desperation the cat plunged head and shoulders into the snow, reaching blindly after the vanished prize. By great good luck she caught it.

It was her first meal in four bitter days. The children had always tried to share with her their Christmas cheer



and enthusiasm, and had usually succeeded in interesting her by an agreeable lavishness in the matter of cream; but never before had she found a Christmas feast so good.

Now she had learned a lesson. Being naturally clever and her wits sharpened by her fierce necessities, she had grasped the idea that it was possible to follow her prey a little way into the snow. She had not realized that the snow was so penetrable. She had quite wiped out the door of this particular runway; so she went and crouched beside a similar one, but here she had to wait a long time before an adventurous mouse came to peer out. But this time she showed that she had grasped her lesson. It was straight at the side of the entrance that she pounced, where instinct told her that the body of the mouse would be. One outstretched paw thus cut off the quarry's retreat. Her tactics were completely successful; and as her head went plunging into the fluffy whiteness she felt the prize between her paws.

Her hunger now fairly appeased, she found herself immensely excited over this new fashion of hunting. Often before had she waited at mouse holes, but never had she found it possible to break down the walls and invade the holes themselves. It was a thrilling idea. As she crept toward another hole a mouse scurried swiftly up the sand and darted into it. The cat, too late to catch him before he disappeared, tried to follow him. Scratching clumsily but hopefully she succeeded in forcing the full length of her body into the snow. She found no sign of the fugitive, which was by this time racing in safety down some dim transverse tunnel. Her eyes, mouth, whiskers and fur full of the powdery white particles, she backed out, much disappointed. But in that moment she had realized that it was much warmer in there beneath the snow than out in the stinging air. It was a second and vitally important lesson; and though she was probably unconscious of having learned it she instinctively put the new lore into practice a little while later.

Having succeeded in catching yet another mouse for

which her appetite made no immediate demand, she carried it back to the house and laid it down in tribute on the veranda steps while she meowed and stared hopefully at the desolate, snow-draped door. Getting no response she carried the mouse down with her to the hollow behind the drift which had been caused by the bulging front of the bay-window on the end of the house. Here she curled herself up forlornly, thinking to have a wink of sleep.

But the still cold was too searching. She looked at the sloping wall of snow beside her and cautiously thrust her paw into it. It was very soft and light. It seemed to offer practically no resistance. She pawed away in an awkward fashion till she had scooped out a sort of tiny cave. Gently she pushed herself into it, pressing back the snow on every side till she had room to turn around.

Then turn around she did several times, as dogs do in getting their beds arranged to their liking. In this process she not only packed down the snow beneath her, but she also rounded out for herself a snug chamber with a comparatively narrow doorway. From this snowy retreat she gazed forth with a solemn air of possession; then she went to sleep with a sense of comfort, of "homeyness," such as she had never before felt since the disappearance of her friends.

Having thus conquered misfortune and won herself the freedom of the winter wild, her life though strenuous was no longer one of any terrible hardship. With patience at the mouse holes she could catch enough to eat; and in her snowy den she slept warm and secure. In a little while, when a crust had formed over the surface, the mice took to coming out at night and holding revels on the snow. Then the owls, too, came back; and the cat, having tried to catch one, got sharply bitten and clawed before she realized the propriety of letting it go. After this experience she decided that owls, on the whole, were meant to be let alone. But for all that she found it fine hunting, out there on the bleak, unfenced, white reaches of the snow.

Thus, mistress of the situation, she found the winter

slipping by without further serious trials. Only once, toward the end of January, did Fate send her another bad quarter of an hour. On the heels of a peculiarly bitter cold snap a huge white owl from the Arctic Barrens came one night to the island. The cat, taking observations from the corner of the veranda, caught sight of him. One look was enough to assure her that this was a very different kind of visitor from the brown marsh owls. She slipped inconspicuously down into her burrow; and until the great white owl went away, some twenty-four hours later, she kept herself discreetly out of sight.

When spring came back to the island, with the nightly shrill chorus of fluting frogs in the shallow, sedgy pools and the young grass alive with nesting birds, the prisoner's life became almost luxurious in its easy abundance. But now she was once more homeless, since her snug den had vanished with the snow. This did not much matter to her, however, for the weather grew warmer and more tranquil day by day; and moreover, she herself, in being forced back upon her instincts, had learned to be as contented as a tramp. Nevertheless, with all her capacity for learning and adapting herself she had not forgotten anything. So when, one day in June, a crowded boat came over from the mainland, and children's voices, clamouring across the grass tops, broke the desolate silence of the island, the cat heard and sprang up out of her sleep on the veranda steps.

For one second she stood, listening intently. Then, almost as a dog would have done, and as few of her supercilious tribe ever condescend to do, she went racing across to the landing place—to be snatched up into the arms of four happy children at once, and to have her fine fur ruffled to a state which it would cost her an hour's assiduous toilet to put in order.

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## *A Black Affair*

W. W. JACOBS

"I DID'NT WANT to bring it," said Captain Gubson, regarding somewhat unfavourably a grey parrot whose cage was hanging against the mainmast, "but my old uncle was so set on it I had to. He said a sea-voyage would set its 'ealth up."

"It seems to be all right at present," said the mate, who was tenderly sucking his forefinger; "best of spirits, I should say."

"It's playful," assented the skipper. "The old man thinks a rare lot of it. I think I shall have a little bit in that quarter, so keep your eye on the beggar."

"Scratch Poll!" said the parrot, giving its bill a preliminary strop on its perch. "Scratch poor Polly!"

It bent its head against the bars, and waited patiently to play off what it had always regarded as the most consummate practical joke in existence. The first doubt it had ever had about it occurred when the mate came forward and obligingly scratched it with the stem of his pipe. It was a wholly unforeseen development, and the parrot, ruffling its feathers, edged along its perch and brooded darkly at the other end of it.

Opinion before the mast was also against the new arrival, the general view being that the wild jealousy which raged in the bosom of the ship's cat would sooner or later lead to mischief.

"Old Satan don't like it," said the cook, shaking his head. "The blessed bird hadn't been aboard ten minutes before Satan was prowling around. The blooming image waited till he was about a foot off the cage, and then he did the perlite and asked him whether he'd like a glass o' beer. I never see a cat so took aback in all my life. Never."

"There'll be trouble between 'em," said old Sam, who was the cat's special protector, "mark my words."

"I'd put my money on the parrot," said one of the men confidently. "It's 'ad a crool bit out of the mate's finger. Where 'ud the cat be agin that beak?"

"Well, you'd lose your money," said Sam. "If you want to do the cat a kindness, every time you see him near that cage cuff his 'ead."

The crew being much attached to the cat, which had been presented to them when a kitten by the mate's wife, acted upon the advice with so much zest that for the next two days the indignant animal was like to have been killed with kindness. On the third day, however, the parrot's cage being on the cabin table, the cat stole furtively down, and, at the pressing request of the occupant itself, scratched its head for it.

The skipper was the first to discover the mischief, and he came on deck and published the news in a voice which struck a chill to all hearts.

"Where's that black devil got to?" he yelled.

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked Sam anxiously.

"Come and look here," said the skipper. He led the way to the cabin, where the mate and one of the crew were already standing, shaking their heads over the parrot.

"What do you make of that?" demanded the skipper fiercely.

"Too much dry food, sir," said Sam, after due deliberation.

"Too much what?" bellowed the skipper.

"Too much dry food," repeated Sam firmly. "A parrot—a grey parrot—wants plenty o' sop. If it don't get it, it moults."

"It's had too much *cat*," said the skipper fiercely, "and you know it, and overboard it goes."

"I don't believe it was the cat, sir," interposed the other man; "it's too soft-hearted to do a thing like that."

"You can shut your jaw," said the skipper, reddening. "Who asked you to come down here at all?"

"Nobody saw the cat do it," urged the mate.

The skipper said nothing, but, stooping down, picked up a tail feather from the floor, and laid it on the table. He then went on deck, followed by the others, and began calling, in seductive tones, for the cat. No reply forthcoming from the sagacious animal, which had gone into hiding, he turned to Sam, and bade him call it.

"No, sir, I won't 'ave no 'and in it," said the old man. "Putting aside my liking for the animal, I'm not going to 'ave anything to do with the killing of a black cat."

"Rubbish!" said the skipper.

"Very good, sir," said Sam, shrugging his shoulders, "you know best, o' course. You're eddicated and I'm not, an' p'raps you can afford to make a laugh o' such things. I knew one man who killed a black cat an' he went mad. There's something very pecooliar about that cat o' ours."

"It knows more than we do," said one of the crew, shaking his head. "That time you—I mean we—ran the smack down, that cat was expecting of it hours before. It was like a wild thing."

"Look at the weather we've 'ad—look at the trips we've made since he's been aboard," said the old man. "Tell me it's chance if you like, but I *know* better."

The skipper hesitated. He was a superstitious man even for a sailor, and his weakness was so well known that he had become a sympathetic receptacle for every ghost story which, by reason of its crudeness or lack of corroboration, had been rejected by other experts. He was a perfect reference library for omens, and his interpretations of dreams had gained for him a widespread reputation.

"That's all nonsense," he said, pausing uneasily; "still, I only want to be just. There's nothing vindictive about me, and I'll have no hand in it myself. Joe, just tie a lump of coal to that cat and heave it overboard."

"Not me," said the cook, following Sam's lead, and working up a shudder. "Not for fifty pun in gold. I don't want to be haunted."

"The parrot's a little better now, sir," said one of the

men, taking advantage of his hesitation, "he's opened one eye."

"Well, I only want to be just," repeated the skipper. "I won't do anything in a hurry, but, mark my words, if the parrot dies that cat goes overboard."

Contrary to expectations, the bird was still alive when London was reached, though the cook, who from his connection with the cabin had suddenly reached a position of unusual importance, reported great loss of strength and irritability of temper. It was still alive, but failing fast on the day they were to put to sea again; and the fo'c'sle, in preparation for the worst, stowed their pet away in the paint-locker, and discussed the situation.

Their council was interrupted by the mysterious behaviour of the cook, who, having gone out to lay in a stock of bread, suddenly broke in upon them more in the manner of a member of a secret society than a humble but useful unit of a ship's company.

"Where's the cap'n?" he asked in a hoarse whisper, as he took a seat on the locker with the sack of bread between his knees.

"In the cabin," said Sam, regarding his antics with some disfavour. "What's wrong, cookie?"

"What d'yer think I've got in here?" asked the cook, patting the bag.

The obvious reply to this question was, of course, bread; but as it was known that the cook had departed specially to buy some, and that he could hardly ask a question involving such a simple answer, nobody gave it.

"It come to me all of a sudden," said the cook, in a thrilling whisper. "I'd just bought the bread and left the shop, when I see a big black cat, the very image of ours, sitting on a doorstep. I just stooped down to stroke its 'ead, when it come to me."

"They will sometimes," said one of the seamen.

"I don't mean that," said the cook, with the contempt of genius. "I mean the idea did. Ses I to myself, 'You might be old Satan's brother by the look of you; an' if the

cap'n wants to kill a cat, let it be you,' I ses. And with that, before it could say Jack Robinson, I picked it up by the scruff o' the neck and shoved it in the bag."

"What, all in along of our bread?" said the previous interrupter, in a pained voice.

"Some of yer are 'ard ter please," said the cook, deeply offended.

"Don't mind him, cook," said the admiring Sam. "You're a masterpiece, that's what you are."

"Of course, if any of you've got a better plan—" said the cook generously.

"Don't talk rubbish, cook," said Sam; "fetch the two cats out and put 'em together."

"Don't mix 'em," said the cook warningly; "for you'll never know which is which agin if you do."

He cautiously opened the top of the sack and produced his captive, and Satan, having been relieved from his prison, the two animals were carefully compared.

"They're as like as two lumps o' coal," said Sam slowly. "Lord, what a joke on the old man. I must tell the mate o' this; he'll enjoy it."

"It'll be all right if the parrot don't die," said the dainty pessimist, still harping on his pet theme. "All that bread spoilt, and two cats aboard."

"Don't mind what he ses," said Sam; "you're a brick, that's what you are. I'll just make a few holes on the lid o' the boy's chest, and pop old Satan in. You don't mind, do you, Billy?"

"Of course he don't," said the other men indignantly.

Matters being thus agreeably arranged, Sam got a gimlet, and prepared the chest for the reception of its tenant, who, convinced that he was being put out of the way to make room for a rival, made a frantic fight for freedom.

"Now get something 'eavy and put on the top of it," said Sam, having convinced himself that the lock was broken; "and, Billy, put the noo cat in the paint-locker till we start; it's home-sick."

The boy obeyed, and the understudy was kept in durance



vile until they were off Limehouse, when he came on deck and nearly ended his career there and then by attempting to jump over the bulwark into the next garden. For some time he paced the deck in a perturbed fashion, and then, leaping on the stern, mewed plaintively as his native city receded farther and farther from his view.

"What's the matter with old Satan?" said the mate, who had been let into the secret. "He seems to have something on his mind."

"He'll have something round his neck presently," said the skipper grimly.

The prophecy was fulfilled some three hours later, when he came up on deck ruefully regarding the remains of a bird whose vocabulary had once been the pride of its native town. He threw it overboard without a word, and then, seizing the innocent cat, who had followed him under the impression that it was about to lunch, produced half a brick attached to a string, and tied it round his neck. The crew, who were enjoying the joke immensely, raised a howl of protest.

"The *Skylark*'ll never have another like it, sir," said Sam solemnly. "That cat was the luck of the ship."

"I don't want any of your old woman's yarns," said the skipper brutally. "If you want the cat, go and fetch it."

He stepped aft as he spoke, and sent the gentle stranger hurtling through the air. There was a "plomp" as it reached the water, a bubble or two came to the surface, and all was over.

"That's the last o' that," he said, turning away.

The old man shook his head. "You can't kill a black cat for nothing," said he, "mark my words! "

The skipper, who was in a temper at the time, thought little of them, but they recurred to him vividly the next day. The wind had freshened during the night, and rain was falling heavily. On deck the crew stood about in oilskins, while below, the boy, in his new capacity of gaoler, was ministering to the wants of an ungrateful prisoner, when the cook, happening to glance that way, was horrified

to see the animal emerge from the fo'c'sle. It eluded easily the frantic clutch of the boy as he sprang up the ladder after it, and walked leisurely along the deck in the direction of the cabin. Just as the crew had given it up for lost it encountered Sam, and the next moment, despite its cries, was caught up and huddled away beneath his stiff, clammy oilskins. At the noise the skipper, who was talking to the mate, turned as though he had been shot, and gazed wildly round him.

"Dick," said he, "can you hear a cat?"

"Cat!" said the mate, in accents of great astonishment.

"I thought I heard it," said the puzzled skipper.

"Fancy, sir," said Dick firmly, as a mewing, appalling in its wrath, came from beneath Sam's coat.

"Did you hear it, Sam?" called the skipper, as the old man was moving off.

"Hear what, sir?" inquired Sam respectfully, without turning round.

"Nothing," said the skipper, collecting himself. "Nothing. All right."

The old man, hardly able to believe in his good fortune, made his way forward, and, seizing a favourable opportunity, handed his ungrateful burden back to the boy.

"Fancy you heard a cat just now?" inquired the mate casually.

"Well, between you an' me, Dick," said the skipper, in a mysterious voice, "I did, and it wasn't fancy neither. I heard that cat as plain as if it was alive."

"Well, I've heard of such things," said the other, "but I don't believe 'em. What a lark if the old cat comes back climbing up over the side out of the sea to-night, with the brick hanging round its neck."

The skipper stared at him for some time without speaking. "If that's your idea of a lark," he said at length, in a voice which betrayed traces of some emotion, "it ain't mine."

"Well, if you hear it again," said the mate cordially, "you might let me know. I'm rather interested in such things."

The skipper, hearing no more of it that day, tried hard to persuade himself that he was the victim of imagination, but, in spite of this, he was pleased at night, as he stood at the wheel, to reflect on the sense of companionship afforded by the look-out in the bows. On his part the look-out was quite charmed with the unwonted affability of the skipper, as he yelled out to him two or three times on matters only faintly connected with the progress of the schooner.

The night, which had been dirty, cleared somewhat, and the bright crescent of the moon appeared above a heavy bank of clouds, as the cat, which had by dint of using its back as a lever at length got free from that cursed chest, licked its shapely limbs, and came up on deck. After its stifling prison, the air was simply delicious.

"Bob!" yelled the skipper suddenly.

"Ay, ay, sir!" said the look-out, in a startled voice.

"Did you mew?" inquired the skipper.

"Did I *wot*, sir?" cried the astonished Bob.

"Mew," said the skipper sharply, "like a cat?"

"No, sir," said the offended seaman. "What 'ud I want to do that for?"

"I don't know what you want to for," said the skipper, looking round him uneasily. "There's some more rain coming, Bob."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Bob.

"Lot o' rain we've had this summer," said the skipper, in a meditative bawl.

"Ay, ay, sir," said Bob. "Sailing-ship on the port bow, sir."

The conversation dropped, the skipper, anxious to divert his thoughts, watching the dark mass of sail as it came plunging out of the darkness into the moonlight until it was abreast of his own craft. His eyes followed it as it passed his quarter, so that he saw not the stealthy approach of the cat which came from behind the companion, and sat down close by him. For over thirty hours the animal had been subjected to the grossest indignities at the hands of every man on board the ship except one. That one was

the skipper, and there is no doubt but that its subsequent behaviour was direct recognition of that fact. It rose to its feet, and crossing over to the unconscious skipper, rubbed its head affectionately and vigorously against his leg.

From simple causes great events do spring. The skipper sprang four yards, and let off a screech which was the subject of much comment on the barque which had just passed. When Bob, who came shuffling up at the double, reached him he was leaning against the side, incapable of speech, and shaking all over.

"Anything wrong, sir?" inquired the seaman anxiously, as he ran to the wheel.

The skipper pulled himself together a bit, and got closer to his companion.

"Believe me or not, Bob," he said at length, in trembling accents, "just as you please, but the ghost of that—cat, I mean the ghost of that poor affectionate animal which I drowned, and which I wish I hadn't, came and rubbed itself up against my leg."

"Which leg?" inquired Bob, who was ever careful about details.

"What the blazes does it matter which leg?" demanded the skipper, whose nerves were in a terrible state. "Ah, look—look there!"

The seaman followed his outstretched finger, and his heart failed him as he saw the cat, with its back arched, gingerly picking its way along the side of the vessel.

"I can't see nothing," he said doggedly.

"I don't suppose you can, Bob," said the skipper in a melancholy voice, as the cat vanished in the bows; "it's evidently only meant for me to see. What it means I don't know. I'm going down to turn in. I ain't fit for duty. You don't mind being left alone till the mate comes up, do you?"

"I ain't afraid," said Bob.

His superior officer disappeared below, and, shaking the sleepy mate, who protested strongly against the proceedings, narrated in trembling tones his horrible experiences.

"If I were you—" said the mate.

"Yes?" said the skipper, waiting a bit. Then he shook him again, roughly.

"What were you going to say?" he inquired.

"Say?" said the mate, rubbing his eyes. "Nothing."

"About the cat?" suggested the skipper.

"Cat?" said the mate, nestling lovingly down in the blankets again. "Wha' ca'—goo'ni'—"

Then the skipper drew the blankets from the mate's sleepy clutches, and, rolling him backwards and forwards in the bunk, patiently explained to him that he was very unwell, that he was going to have a drop of whiskey neat, and turn in, and that he, the mate, was to take the watch. From this moment the joke lost much of its savour for the mate.

"You can have a nip too, Dick," said the skipper, proffering him the whiskey, as the other sullenly dressed himself.

"It's all rot," said the mate, tossing the spirits down his throat, "and it's no use either; you can't run away from a ghost; it's just as likely to be in your bed as anywhere else. Good night."

He left the skipper pondering over his last words, and dubiously eyeing the piece of furniture in question. Nor did he retire until he had subjected it to an analysis of the most searching description, and then, leaving the lamp burning, he sprang hastily in, and forgot his troubles in sleep.

It was day when he awoke and went on deck to find a heavy sea running, and just sufficient sail set to keep the schooner's head before the wind as she bobbed about on the waters. An exclamation from the skipper, as a wave broke against the side and flung a cloud of spray over him, brought the mate's head round.

"Why, you ain't going to get up?" he said, in tones of insincere surprise.

"Why not?" inquired the other gruffly.

"You go and lay down agin," said the mate, "and have a cup o' nice hot tea an' some toast."

"Clear out," said the skipper, making a dash for the wheel, and reaching it as the wet deck suddenly changed its angle. "I know you didn't like being woke up, Dick; but I got the horrors last night. Go below and turn in."

"All right," said the mollified mate.

"You didn't see anything?" inquired the skipper, as he took the wheel from him.

"Nothing at all," said the other.

The skipper shook his head thoughtfully, then shook it again vigorously, as another shower-bath put its head over the side and saluted him.

"I wish I hadn't drowned that cat, Dick," he said.

"You won't see it again," said Dick, with the confidence of a man who had taken every possible precaution to render the prophecy a safe one.

He went below, leaving the skipper at the wheel idly watching the cook as he performed marvellous feats of jugglery, between the galley and the fo'c'sle, with the men's breakfast.

A little while later, leaving the wheel to Sam, he went below himself and had his own, talking freely, to the discomfort of the conscience-stricken cook, about his weird experiences of the night before.

"You won't see it no more, sir, I don't expect," he said faintly; "I b'leeve it come and rubbed itself up agin your leg to show it forgave you."

"Well, I hope it knows it's understood," said the other. "I don't want it to take any more trouble."

He finished the breakfast in silence, and then went on deck again. It was still blowing hard, and he went over to superintend the men who were attempting to lash together some empties which were rolling about in all directions amidships. A violent roll set them free again, and at the same time separated two chests in the fo'c'sle, which were standing one on top of the other. This enabled Satan, who was crouching in the lower one, half crazed with terror, to come flying madly up on deck and give his feelings full vent. Three times in full view of the horrified

skipper he circled the deck at racing speed, and had just started on the fourth when a heavy packing-case, which had been temporarily set on end and abandoned by the men at his sudden appearance, fell over and caught him by the tail. Sam rushed to the rescue.

"Stop!" yelled the skipper.

"Won't I put it up, sir?" inquired Sam.

"Do you see what's beneath it?" said the skipper, in a husky voice.

"Beneath it, sir?" said Sam, whose ideas were in a whirl.

"The cat, can't you see the cat?" said the skipper, whose eyes had been riveted on the animal since its first appearance on deck.

Sam hesitated for a moment, and then shook his head.

"The case has fallen on the cat," said the skipper, "I can see it distinctly.

He might have said "heard it," too, for Satan was making frenzied appeals to his sympathetic friends for assistance.

"Let me put the case back, sir," said one of the men, "then p'raps the wision'll disappear."

"No, stop where you are," said the skipper. "I can stand it better by daylight. It's the most wonderful and extraordinary thing I've ever seen. Do you mean to say you can't see anything, Sam?"

"I can see a case, sir," said Sam, speaking slowly and carefully, "with a bit of rusty iron band sticking out from it. That's what you're mistaking for the cat, p'raps, sir."

"Can't you see anything, cook?" demanded the skipper.

"It may be fancy, sir," faltered the cook, lowering his eyes, "but it does seem to me as though I can see a little misty sort o' thing there. Ah, now it's gone."

"No, it ain't," said the skipper. "The ghost of Satan's sitting there. The case seems to have fallen on its tail. It appears to be howling something dreadful."

The men made a desperate effort to display the astonishment suitable to such a marvel, whilst Satan, who was trying all he knew to get his tail out, cursed freely. How long the superstitious captain of the *Skylark* would have let him

remain there will never be known, for just then the mate came on deck and caught sight of it before he was quite aware of the part he was expected to play.

"Why the devil don't you lift the thing off the poor brute," he yelled, hurrying towards the case.

"What, can *you* see it, Dick?" said the skipper impressively, laying his hand on his arm.

"*See* it?" retorted the mate. "D'ye think I'm blind? Listen to the poor brute. I should—Oh!"

He became conscious of the concentrated significant gaze of the crew. Five pairs of eyes speaking as one, all saying "idiot" plainly, the boy's eyes conveying an expression too great to be translated.

Turning, the skipper saw the byplay, and a light slowly dawned upon him. But he wanted more, and he wheeled suddenly to the cook for the required illumination.

The cook said it was a lark. Then he corrected himself and said it wasn't a lark, then he corrected himself again and became incoherent. Meantime the skipper eyed him stonily, while the mate released the cat and good-naturedly helped to straighten its tail.

It took fully five minutes of unwilling explanation before the skipper could grasp the situation. He did not appear to fully understand it until he was shown the chest with the ventilated lid; then his countenance cleared, and, taking the unhappy Billy by the collar, he called sternly for a piece of rope.

By this statesmanlike handling of the subject a question of much delicacy and difficulty was solved, discipline was preserved, and a practical illustration of the perils of deceit afforded to a youngster who was at an age best suited to receive such impressions. That he should exhaust the resources of a youthful but powerful vocabulary upon the crew in general, and Sam in particular, was only to be expected. They bore him no malice for it, but, when he showed signs of going beyond his years, held a hasty consultation, and then stopped his mouth with sixpence-half-penny and a broken jack-knife.



## *To Jake, wherever he may be!*

MORYS GASCOYEN

### I

IN AUGUST, 1922, Jake, a beautiful white kitten six weeks old, was brought from Gloucestershire to be the saviour of a rat-ridden home in Surrey. Here he was introduced to two terriers—one Irish and the other rough-haired English—and another cat, "Monday," the son of a dead and much-lamented "Sunday." Monday was too busy fighting the other cats of the neighbourhood to take an interest in rats; he was a scarred old warrior, but friendly in the house. The English terrier was, as dogs go, a brilliant rat killer; the Irishman was ardent in the chase, not wholly unsuccessful as a catcher of rats, but so anxious that no one should share his rat with him that he generally galloped off with the live rat in his mouth and quite forgot to kill it. Both lacked the strategy which makes the ratting cat supreme in that particular line of business. Cats and dogs were all on the best of terms with one another, and, at an early age, Jake elected to accompany the dogs on their evening exercising walks. He would trot or canter along the pathway with them, occasionally reconnoitring over walls or fences, and made a point of slipping ahead by devious ways on the return journey to be first home, and pretend that he had never been away. He soon learned his name and—if he was hungry—a shout of "Jake" would bring him bounding like a panther to the house.

Later Jake made the acquaintance of Katherine Anne. She was a black kitten picked up in the garden by one of the dogs and brought into the house. As no owner could be found for her, she became a resident and for a while she and Jake were great friends. But in time a feud arose between them, and when, later on, Katherine's kittens

were all foully murdered in one night, suspicion fell upon Jake. The truth will never be known; but Jake certainly resented the arrival of the first litter, though he tolerated them, and the murder of the second was obviously the work of a cat.

Jake was a sociable kitten, and he loved comfort. He therefore chose his lady mistress's bed as his abiding place by preference. He had a quaint habit of creeping gently under the bed-spread and curling himself up beneath it without displacing it at all. When first this trick was discovered Jake had already been anxiously sought far and wide before a barely perceptible undulation of the bed-spread revealed his presence beneath it. But, although he retired nightly to sleep on his mistress's bed, he soon began to show that he came of a hunting strain. From the open window of the bedroom he could run along the roof of a conservatory and thence, down the branches of a California Allspice, to the lawn. When he was but a few months old he began to bring back live trophies of the chase—first a shrew-mouse, then a field vole, then a starling (all of which were rescued and enlarged), and next a succession of young rats. Young rats let loose in the bedroom at dawn, pursued, caught and released again by a bounding kitten, banish sleep and harrow the feelings. Rats were, however, the bane of the house and had to be destroyed, so the English terrier was called in to dispatch them, to Jake's great chagrin. The result of this was that he soon gave up bringing his catches into the house, and the next evidences of his activities were dead rats—many of them—laid out on the front door mat or dropped about the garden paths.

By the time he was nine months of age the old Surrey cottage, which had practically been held to ransom by rats, was entirely free of them; not even to the outhouses did they dare to penetrate. Jake had made the premises too hot to hold them. As the rats receded Jake extended his range, and began to be absent for increasingly long periods on hunting bent.

Meanwhile his temper disimproved. The affectionate

kitten gave place to a cat of uncertain moods. He was an angel at his best, but would turn into a very devil without warning. He would throw himself on the ground and beg you to play with him, and fasten teeth and claws into your hand in the middle of the game. He had some respect for the master of the house, but little for anybody else. But, for his efficiency and his originality of character, he was forgiven all and was thoroughly pampered.

Then came the move to London. There were anxious consultations about Jake. What would become of such a rover in such surroundings? He would certainly wander; would he not inevitably be run over, lost, or stolen? These chances had to be taken and, on the whole, they were taken with some confidence in the result. The traffic of the Surrey roads, which Jake crossed with impunity, was far more dangerous than that of London; he might be lost, but was probably too cute; he was unlikely to be stolen because there were at most three people whom he would, in any circumstances, allow to pick him up. After two days' incarceration in the new house, which is but a few minutes' walk from the Zoological Gardens, he was let out. Catlike he took a careful note of his surroundings, then deliberately crossed the road and vanished in the direction of the Zoo. After an absence of a few hours he came back carrying a half-grown rat, which he loosed, alive and uninjured, in the house. This was apparently just to show what he could do, for he never brought another. Thereafter he was free to come and go as he pleased; the Zoo became his happy hunting-ground, and he spent most of his time there.

For a while Jake returned with some regularity to be fed and to put in occasional spells of sleep. Then he disappeared for a week, and the worst fears were entertained; but he was found in a large aviary adjoining the sea lions' pond. He had found a way in where rats had been working under the wire, but the same way would not serve him to get out. He had taken refuge in the rocks at the end of the aviary, where he subsisted as best he might. He

would not let any of the keepers pick him up, but he came out when his reputed owner called him, and was carried home protesting. There, having eaten a large meal of fish and drunk unbelievable quantities of milk, he was locked in the dining-room to await the return of his mistress, who was out. The window of the dining-room, some twelve feet high, was opened to about a foot's width at the top. Within half an hour a message was received at the house that Jake had just been seen on his way back to the Zoological Gardens!

In the Zoo he has found his spiritual home. His visits to his registered address are increasingly rare. He has chosen his life and, although there is always an open window, food, drink, and a welcome for him at home, no attempt has been made to constrain him. In the Gardens he works systematically. Having marked down a colony or family of rats, he haunts their vicinity till he has killed the lot, and then he seeks out another and sticks to that till it is finished. Therefore, and because he does not attack birds, he is welcomed, fed, and protected. But he has lost a good deal of his early beauty. White cats do not wear well in London, and Jake, whose life's work leads him into many odd corners, is rather pale grey than white. But he is happy and contented after his own fashion, "walking by his wild lone," and doing good by stealth—for his own satisfaction.

## II

I have never thought that Katherine Anne was a really nice cat; but I must say that I have a certain sympathy with her in the matter of Jake's occasional return visits. Recently Jake has been a fairly frequent, though irregular, caller, and as his first visit of this series occurred after an interval of more than eighteen months, during which, if we wished to see him, we had to call on him at the Zoo, Katherine Anne naturally thought herself firmly established as the only cat of the household. Then suddenly, one

evening, Jake walked in, squalling for food and lashing his great tail as of old, and everybody ran to do his bidding. Katherine's ration was promptly appropriated for him, libations of milk were poured; Jake purred, and the household rejoiced. Having fed, he ceased to purr, took the best chair he could find, and, treating with offensive contumely all who sought to express their adoration, curled up and went to sleep. And then the whole household went on tiptoe lest he should awake and, in dudgeon, forsake the roof-tree again. Katherine Anne wanted to spit at him—worse, if she could attack him in flank or rear—but she was assiduously forestalled, and her rage knew no bounds.

The prodigal had returned with a vengeance, and he had eaten Katherine's fatted calf—raw shin of beef, to be accurate—and she had to content herself with scraps; she hates cooked food, except dried fish. Certainly hers was a hard case. She is quite unprincipled, but even she could not say to us—that is, cat fashion, make us feel—"Lo, these many years do I serve thee," for she knows as well as we do that she never did a useful thing in her life, whereas Jake, in the old country days, rid us of a plague of rats. Nor can she say, "Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment," for she persistently and wilfully breaks every rule laid down for the animals of the household. One immutable law is that food is not to be taken off the table or the sideboard. But Katherine has a passion for cake—especially new cake—and has more than once eaten the whole of the top of a cake with gluttonous speed. She cannot even decently charge Jake with the murder of her offspring. We all believe that he murdered the second litter of kittens, and probably Katherine knows, although she was not there, for such knowledge is given to cats; but the trouble is that she was not there. If she had been there, instead of engaging in a disreputable excursion by night in low company, she might have protected them or summoned assistance. It cannot be denied that she is an atrociously bad mother, obviously bored with her children and immoral to boot. So she has not got a leg to stand on, and when

Jake pays us a visit he is received with all honours, not because he is affectionate, which he isn't, or even moderately courteous, but because his visits are rare, whereas Katherine Anne is ever with us. We know perfectly well that Jake only comes when he has missed the market at the Zoo, that is to say when, intent on hunting, he has returned to find that the butcher has left and the room in which a bed is daily prepared for him is closed. Then he returns to us because he knows there is always an open window and always a foolish welcome awaiting him. As soon as the doors are open in the morning he departs without ceremony—to Katherine's undisguised satisfaction.

Another thing that rouses Katherine Anne to unmeasured fury is her lady mistress's passion for strays. She forgets—or perhaps she too acutely remembers—that she herself was a stray, and when a starveling kitten is brought in from the street to have a much-needed meal she behaves so vilely that she has to be shut up out of the way. The fact is that Katherine Anne is like Peter Pan: she has never grown up. Incidentally she contradicts Peter Pan's famous axiom that girls are much too clever to fall out of their prams, for Katherine Anne is certainly a girl, and, metaphorically speaking, she fell out of her pram. For a kitten to wander into a strange garden, full of dogs, and to allow itself to be caught and carried about in triumph by a delighted Irish terrier, is surely the nearest thing in kitten stupidity to falling out of one's pram. Fortunately, Patrick was fond of cats, and brought her in to be added to the collection, of which now—for Jake hardly counts—she is the sole survivor.

She is over six years old, but is still a kitten. True she has been three times a mother; but she has no conscience about her offspring. For a brief while she finds them interesting toys, but she would sooner have a nut than any of them. Her lady mistress eats nuts—it may be a penance or a disease—and there is always a dish of nuts on the sideboard. Katherine Anne's greatest joy is to throw them one by one on the floor and chase them. No one nut serves

her for very long; it is getting them out of the dish and on to the floor that is the real game, though, as a matter of form, each one must be patted about and chased for a while. Walking over the dining-room floor after one of Katherine's nut frolics is nerve-racking. If it is a brazil it hurts; if it is a walnut or a filbert it goes off with a resounding crack; you jump, and as likely as not come down upon another.

At night, when it is time to go to bed, Katherine Anne's great game is to disappear. The first stage of the game is to dash madly upstairs and downstairs, from room to room, under and over the furniture, in the hope that somebody will pursue her. We've known that game for six years, and we know that she has every intention of sleeping on her mistress's bed—unless she has some vulgar assignation out of doors—so we don't take any notice. Then she disappears. It is very easy for a small black cat to disappear, and Katherine wins the trick, because she must not be shut up in any room, nor must the doors be left open in case a wind should get up and the household be awakened by their banging; so she must be found.

Of course, she is found at long last and is carried off to bed. And then she becomes the dear, affectionate little cat. As long as the light is up she sits on her lady mistress's chest or shoulder and purrs loudly. When the light is put out she sits on the pillow or curls up beside her. But if she is disturbed by any movement of the rightful proprietor of the bed she is not unlikely to turn nasty-tempered, like the naughty child she is, and to let fly an unsheathed claw with vicious impetuosity. And, but a little later, if the night be cold, she may be patting her gently on the cheek as a signal that the bedclothes are to be raised so that she may creep into the warmth within.

The dogs endure with marvellous equanimity the assaults of her Peter Pannish antics. In the house her usual mood is one of exuberant affection, in which she rubs herself against them, purring shrilly. Outside she deliberately lies in ambush for them behind trees or corners of houses, wait-

ing patiently till they pass her, broadside on, so that she can make a demoralizing flank attack. Fortunately, they are very good-humoured about it, being used to cats, or it might be a serious matter for Katherine. In fact, she has been very lucky in her choice of a "Never-Never Land," where she can play at pirates and wolves and all the other childish games, which, in a less tolerant society, might bring her into desperate trouble. It is all very well up to a point, but whenever I analyse the character of Katherine Anne, I return to the conclusion with which I began, that she is not a really nice cat. Now Jake does not pretend to be.

### III

This morning, as I walked alone across the canal bridge, I wondered whether your ever-restless spirit was hovering nearby. For there flashed upon the eye of my mind a vision erstwhile familiar—that of a gallant old Irish terrier and a pure white cat with jade-green eyes walking shoulder to shoulder in perfect amity to the wonderment of those that passed by. "Just fancy!" they would say, and "Did you ever?" For they accepted blindly the tradition of mortal enmity between cat and dog which you and I know to be a foolish myth. Were you conscious, I wonder, of the interest you aroused, or were you, as you appeared to be, sublimely indifferent?

We three shall not meet again on this side of the gulf; but I trust that you and Barney are bearing one another company, passing a pleasant time together as you wait for us, your friends. I wonder whether you liked him best of all. You never wore your heart where daws could peck at it. Sometimes you seemed to dislike us greatly: but at least you paid us one great compliment—you were wayward, but you had faith in our constancy. You trusted us: you never doubted that, if you chose to return to our abode, you would be welcomed and fed. The way you shouted outside the door, the confidence with which, with tail erect, you marched in when it was opened to you, your vociferous



demands for the food and drink you knew would be offered as quickly as human activity permitted were proof of that. But, old friend, in all lovingkindness let it be said, we had to make allowances. Why, when you had had your fill, did you so often leave us, not merely in indecent haste, but with vituperation? For you did, you know. The language you used, if the front door was not opened on the instant, when you wished to go, was often unseemly—not to say unkind. And yet we never bore you a grudge, and how much would we give to hear again outside the door your imperious summons, upon which she would say, "There's Jake!" and I would rush to the door, and you would march in with the airs of all the emperors.

In your life and in your death you were an enigma: you seemed to like us best away from our own abode. We both humbly recognize that places rather than persons are the object of a cat's affections. We tried to make this new home pleasant; but yours was a restless soul, and you were a mighty hunter before the Lord. That was the real trouble. In the Zoo there were rats—more rats than ever you could cope with—here there were none; and when, soon after our arrival here, you tried to introduce a supply, letting one loose in the house for your later recreation, we bade a terrier dispose of it. That, I suppose, was the unforgivable offence. From then on, although you were delighted—or appeared to be—to meet us on our walks, either in or near the Zoo, your visits to this house became increasingly rare.

We are glad to think that, in those last days before we left London for a holiday—the pleasant warm days of July—you and we had frequent encounters. We were privileged to stroll in the Gardens after closing time, and whenever we spent a summer evening thus you would quietly join us as if you had known we were coming. If we had a lurking suspicion that it was jealousy rather than affection which drew you—jealousy of those other cats that we visited, the ocelots especially, whom you wilfully enraged by displaying your careless liberty before their captive eyes

—we were, nevertheless, pleased and flattered that you never failed to find us out.

It was about this time that we said “Good-bye” to Barney, with many tears, and you were one of the few remaining links with the old times. Did you know? Cats know so much. And then we went to the country. You were well, so far as we knew. But when I returned on a brief visit and called, as we always did, on your very faithful friend hard by the refreshment rooms for news of you, I learned that you were gone. They had missed you for a day or two at the time of the Bank-Holiday crowds, and then they found your body on the roof where so often you had basked and slept in the sun. I hope you had a peaceful passing, old friend. What was it? We shall never know till we meet you again where the barriers of speech are broken and you can tell us. At least you lived your life in your own fashion. We never gainsaid you, or put constraint upon you. You always hated crowds. Had the swelling August tide of humanity in the Gardens something to do with your passing? Or was it Barney you used to come home occasionally to see—not us at all—and did your wild spirit shake off its mortal shackles to go and seek him? I think it was so: and I trust that you, who were not one to be baulked, have succeeded in your last quest.

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